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The mark of the aristocrat

By Richard Ellmann

A. W. RAITT:

The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam
367pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford
University Press. £25.
0 19 815771 1

Jean-Marie-Mathieu-Philippe-Auguste, Comte de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. As Wallace Stevens said of Fénélon, "The name is enough." For its bearer, who swaggered in late nineteenth-century France, history was chiefly the reverberations of the name. It had been borne by a celebrated Marshal of France in the fifteenth century, and not long afterwards by a military hero who was Grand Master of the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem as well as founder of the Knights of Malta. Villiers would write the life of the first, and aspire to the pomp of both. His ancestry gave him the right, he thought, to confer any number of decorations on himself, and he wore them while his friends looked on in distress. When a rival claimant to the family name appeared, Villiers offered to kill him at twenty paces, but was mollified when the rival conceded that both were entitled to use the name. When in 1862 Greece was in search of a king, Villiers, always *plus royaliste que le roi*, offered to take the job to which his birth entitled him. After all, as he said when proposing to run on the royalist ticket for the Chamber of Deputies, he was one of those "men whose whole past, ancestral as well as personal, guarantees the future".

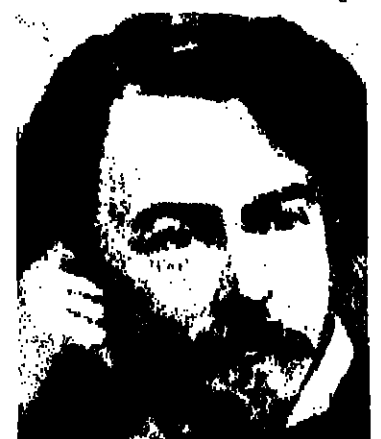
To his friend Mallarmé Villiers appeared to be the type of the poet, aristocrat of letters as well as of the Almanach de Gotha. To him, as to Mallarmé, Villiers's work "had the unmistakable clank of genius". Genius was so freely attributed to Villiers, even as his works were being rejected, that one of his *Contes Cruels* presents a young man who offers an article to an editor with the positive assurance that it has not a trace of genius in it. Unfortunately, the editor is not persuaded and rejects it. Villiers's personality had about it something absolute; he was in all things a bitter-ender. Baudelaire accepted him as a friend and recognized him as a writer of his own kind. When Edmund Wilson was

looking through Yeats's eyes for a symbol of symbolism at its most flagrant, he chose *Axel's Castle* for the title of his book.

Villiers dazzled his contemporaries with his arrogant extremism, though he claimed that submissiveness was fundamental to his character. Wearing frayed and none too clean clothing, he yet managed to lord it in an expensive overcoat trimmed with fur. To a woman who stared at his ungloved hands at a reception and dared to say, "What fine gloves you have on, Monsieur le Comte," he replied, "A gift from my mother." His imaginative power, his eloquence, his savage epigrams and sudden bursts of story-telling, enabled him to come into his own at Mallarmé's *murals*. When Oscar Wilde made his astonishing appearance in Paris two years after Villiers's death, it was to Villiers's that his wit and eloquence were compared. And like Wilde, Villiers was capable of elaborating some fiction or pose and then laughing it away.

Until now the life of Villiers has been elusive and problematic, made up to a large extent of unsifted rumour. Villiers of course left no memoir; he shares the contempt for biography which the hero of *Axel* expresses in the celebrated epigram, "As for living, our servants will do that for us." In that play the master Janus explains, "Your existence is only the agitation of your essence in the occult uterus where your definitive future — your decisive conception — is elaborated." No wonder then that Mallarmé should say of his friend, "His life — I search for anything that corresponds to this expression: truly and in the ordinary sense, did he live?" The question may be unanswerable in Mallarmé's terms, but thanks to A. W. Raitt we now have the record of his seeming existence. Dr Raitt, Reader in French at Oxford, is editing the Pléiade edition of Villiers's complete works, and has written extensively on him in French and English. His biography is finely constructed and well written, admiring yet necessarily a little reserved and at times amused in relation to its strange and imposing subject. A certain enigmatic quality remains, as if to confirm Mallarmé; Villiers, who loved golden sphinxes and Gothic passageways, would have been pleased by it.

The life that Raitt so adroitly reconstructs is a tale of repeated defeats, usually sombre though sometimes ludicrous. Things tended to go wrong, as when Richard Wagner, after first taking to Villiers, suddenly turned against him, to Villiers's despair. Then there was the theatre. Villiers longed to be a successful dramatist, and today his play *La Révolte* is in the repertoire of the Comédie Française. Yet time after time, just as one of his several plays was to be staged, a hitch would develop. Renewed efforts brought about renewed cancellations until Villiers found in ill-fortune a theme for further works. He was thwarted in other ways as well. By inclination a duellist, he issued challenges yet somehow, Raitt thinks, never fought



Villiers de l'Isle-Adam

a duel; he had to content himself with serving his friends as their grand and punctilious second, and with devising a duel for Axel. The same fate befell his politics. Villiers ardently supported the Comte de Chambord for king of France, only to have him die without an heir.

Perhaps his unsuccess was most conspicuous in his agonized attempts to rescue the family fortunes by marrying an heiress. Though he was not well featured, and considered himself to be ugly, he was convinced that no woman would be able to resist his matchless name. He went so far as to engage a go-between, who was to receive a third of the dowry, provided that was at least 3 million francs. There were many fruitless trips. An Irishwoman, Miss Eyre Powell, was drawn to him at first,

but eventually decided (after too heavy a burst of his eloquence) that he was mad. Raitt estimates that Villiers sought the best-dressed hand of at least thirty wealthy women in vain. One, a Jewess, he rejected out of hand, for fear of besmirching his dynastic purity. As his prospects dimmed, he grew more desperate. There is a letter from him to Jules Favre, Thiers's Minister of Foreign Affairs, in 1871, in which he asks to be appointed attaché to the French Embassy in London: "The fact is that this title would open for me, in the age of thirty-two, a career in which I may sooner or later distinguish myself in the useful service of the interests of my country. The position which it would confer on me at the English Court would raise legitimate hopes of the sort of marriage which could save a great and ancient family from coming to an end in undeserved oblivion." He concludes, "After due reflection I can find no reason why, in the eyes of a representative of the French Republic, there should be any motive for refusal in the considerations which I have just set forth."

Yet he must have despised himself somewhat for his fortune-hunting, since in his story "Virginie et Paul" he satirizes brutally the way money persuades the lovers' affection for each other. In his play *La Révolte* the wife who has kept her husband's accounts and made him rich suddenly informs him that she is leaving him, because her life has fallen too short of her ideal. She soon returns, finding that her revolt has come too late and that she is nostalgic even for the boredom of her old life. The husband imagines she has returned out of love for him, but in a new access of gloom she says, "Poor man!" as the curtain falls.

In his later years Villiers lived with his widowed charwoman, Marie Dantine, and tried to keep his friends from knowing. He had a son by her, and at last, to legitimize the boy and enable the ancient name to continue, he consented on his deathbed to marry. He had first to make very sure that he was dying. It was a magnificently ignominious end for a man who had fancied himself so noble and so nubile; yet it had its redeeming aspect, as common life and ordinary affection asserted their claims. Raitt attributes Villiers's

many failures in part to himself, and subtly comments: "No doubt the regularity with which he had suffered disappointments and frustrations was making him so fearful of failures that he would himself seek to provoke them to prevent his hopes rising too high." There is an excellent example of this disposition in a letter of request that Villiers wrote: "I know very well that, by writing to you, I am offering you an opportunity of not replying that you will be only too happy to grasp."

All his life Villiers expected a shower of gold. The notion had come to him from his father, who called himself marquis. They agreed that there was a treasure, but diverged on what to do with it. The marquis, with simple avarice, had formed the idea that at the time of the French Revolution many royalists had buried money and jewels underground, and had later been unable to recover them. He claimed to know also that the Knights of Malta, founded by his ancestor, had buried their treasure near Quintin. Treasure in fact was everywhere, and all that was needed was to follow the clues. For those he was never at a loss. To pursue his search seriously in any given place he had first to buy the land in which the putative treasure lay. If he failed to find it, he would then have to sell the land, usually at a loss. Sometimes, says Raitt, he was excavating ten or twelve sites at once. All he ever found was one dinner service. Another of the marquis's schemes was to locate supporting documents for people who had been unlawfully deprived of property. But whether he dug into terrain or archives, the search for wealth made him poor. Of course it was a poverty with panache. When his son proposed to marry a daughter of Théophile Gautier, the marquis indignantly rejected the idea on the grounds that she was illegitimate and, as the daughter of a writer and a singer, ill born. Villiers, aware that he would lose the allowance an aunt was making him, had to withdraw as politely as he could from the misalliance.

The father's conviction of the buried treasure set off his son's imagination in the play *Axel*, on which Villiers worked most of his writing life with the hope that it would prove his masterpiece. Perhaps it

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was intended to be the blend of Christianity, Hegelianism, and occultism of which he had always dreamed. The treasure is buried in Axel's castle, stored there as the unique had said from the time of the Revolution. But Sara de Maupér, whose family shares the same crest as Axel's, has independently discovered its whereabouts from Rosicrucian documents. Axel meets her in the treasure chamber and she tries ineffectually to shoot him. They fall in love. She proposes that they enjoy their wealth together, but Axel proposes something infinitely grander. Instead of exploiting the treasure, they must renounce it.

Both Axel and Sara have engaged in a little renunciation already. Sara by giving up her worldly goods to enter a nunnery. Axel by allowing a relative to have his inheritance. Besides this form of renunciation, they also renounced two spiritual treasures, one Christian, the other occult. Sara, about to take the archdeacon's ministry, is asked by the archdeacon whether she will accept the Christian gift of "light, hope, and life". She answers, "No!" In parallel terms, Axel is offered the same gift by Master Janus in the name of the occult, and he too has said "No!" But there is more renunciation to come. In a famous scene, Axel persuades Sara that they should give up not only the material treasure but also the equally material gratification of their love for each other. Rather than submit to the grossness of wealth, or to the inevitable diminution of physical passion, they should commit suicide.

Villiers is none too clear about the meaning of this gesture, but possibly it represents for them what Thomas Aquinas calls (in a phrase quoted in the play and much repeated by Yeats), "the full possession of themselves in one and the same moment". The original idea was probably that they would find their true

treasure in this simultaneous realization and renunciation of being, "all they have aimed at, found, and lost", in Yeats's words. Villiers's Faust and Faustine have outstripped Goethe's hero by finding something better than the freedoms of this world. But Villiers, in a late burst of confidence, added the stage direction that the two lovers are now hum of everyday life reassured itself over the silent scene. Marie Pantine - common life - was out over all this flamboyance, but as Raitt says, the palindrome does not convince.

The ultimate renunciation at the play's climax had its origins long before. Villiers could never follow an expected course. As a boy at school, he got himself expelled for making forbidden associations with people outside the school. Then he entered a seminary to become a priest, but developed doubts, probably by reading Eliphaz Levi and other occultists, and left. Raitt suggests on the basis of Axel that Villiers had in youth a sweetheart who left him to take the veil, but it would seem more likely that Sara's resounding "No!" to her own vows is an echo of Villiers's own "No!" to the seminary. He renounced such renunciations, yet retained such renunciations, in the name of literature, for from the first he had known himself to be a writer. Literature meant for him something satanic or at least lustful, something uncommon to replace something common. In Axel the archdeacon quotes an undiscoverable text attributed to the Psalmist, "Quoniam non cognovi litteraturam, introibo in potentias Dei." The literary vocation was a dangerous one.

Still, in so far as he responded to Christian ritual and faith, Villiers made out of being, as he said, "homo duplex", an internal drama. He found a focus for this ambiguity in words, which he saw pulling in

two contrary directions. People "have no idea how far the power of the word goes", he said, "and yet they were born of a word, like everything that exists". Many of his stories are formed out of the unexpected shift of words from one meaning to another. So in the first story of *Conjure Witches*, "The Dialectic Sisters", the two sisters have pleased their parents by taking up prostitution. But one of them has the effrontery to fall in love with a young man, and he has the impudence to offer her marriage. The parents are outraged and try to separate them but fail; they ostracize their errant daughter while her sister continues virtuously to ply her trade. Marriage is shameful, prostitution filial.

A similar shift comes in Villiers's play *L'Evasion*, in which an escaping convict, touched by a newly married couple's love for each other, allows himself to be led back to prison and says, "It is now I feel I am truly escaping." In Axel not only do *treasure* and *renunciation* change their meanings, Villiers intends something more when he has Sara renounce the convent on Christmas Day, and Sara and Axel material wealth and the material world on Easter Day. A parallel with Christ is affirmed by the synchronization: Sara and Axel choose to be their own victims.

Mr Raitt's fine book satisfies most of our curiosity about Villiers's experiences. It must be said that he is reluctant to plumb his subject's tergiversations, and that his treatment of the writings, while valuable, is rather brief if they are to be understood as way-stations in Villiers's psychic life. On a minor point, one could wish that Mr Raitt would name more frequently the year, and not only the month, in which things happen. His book makes Villiers for the first time fully accessible.



"Girl on a Terrace" (1971), painted in oil, from the exhibition of Patrick Caulfield's Paintings 1963-81, at the Tate Gallery, London, from October 27 to January 3 1982 (reviewed in the TLS September 11, when at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). The 48 paintings are reproduced, with an introduction by Marco Livingstone, in the catalogue (88pp, Tate Gallery, £7.50, 0 905005 23 0).

Colossus of Knossos

By Dilys Powell

SYLVIA L. HORWITZ:

The Find of a Lifetime
Sir Arthur Evans and the Discovery
of Knossos
278pp, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £25.50, 0 297 78008 5

Archaeologists are born, archaeologists are made. Arthur Evans, discoverer and re-creator of the Minoan world, was an archaeologist both born and made. He was born with the intellectual curiosity, the adventurousness and the passion to discover which characterized the scholar-travellers of the Victorian era; and he grew up in an atmosphere of learning. Born in 1851, he was the eldest son of John Evans, a well-to-do paper-manufacturer who was also a distinguished paleontologist. Exposed to his father's interests, Arthur as a child was already drawing coins and making his own collection of antiquities. When he was fourteen he went digging in northern France with his father for the flint implements which are among a paleontologist's pieces of evidence in the pursuit of human prehistory. He was thus in a way made by John Evans. "Little Evans, son of John Evans the Great", somebody called him when he was a boy.

Sylvia L. Horwitz, in what turns out to be a successful biography, deals in some detail with the childhood and the family. The detail is useful in stabilizing the outlines of a life complicated by a host of relations. After the death of Harriet, his first wife and Arthur's mother, John Evans remarried twice. There is an affectionate family chronicle, *Time and Chance*, by Joan Evans, product of the third marriage and thirty-one years younger than her half-brother Arthur. But delightful as one finds her book it is bewilderingly full of related names: the Dickinsons and the Phelps, the Lewis and Alice and another Harriet. Lewis and Alice have got the relationships admirably clear.

To say that her own work "turns out" to be a successful biography is an

admission to an initial mistrust of a portrait of a flamboyant figure drawn without personal acquaintance. Ms Horwitz never knew Arthur Evans; after all he died forty years ago. But she has met some of the people concerned in the story; and she won the confidence of the late Joan Evans, on whose recollections she very properly relies. *The Find of a Lifetime* has the air of an intuitive acquaintance with its subject, and the intuition is solidly backed by research and investigation.

One follows, then, with pleasure the reward of an indomitable career. Perhaps not everybody knows about Arthur Evans's involvement, in the period before he had set foot in Crete, with his Balkan. In 1875 he set out with his brother Lewis to walk through Bosnia and Herzegovina (now part of Yugoslavia). It was in its day an enterprise a little like the journey Patrick Leigh Fermor has described in *A Time of Gifts*, but with a more

political aim and a more dangerous setting. Arthur wanted to write a book about the past and present of the area, at the time under Turkish rule. The two brothers were once arrested as spies. But they were not deterred, and by the time they reached Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik) Arthur was a devoted supporter of the cause of Pan-Slavic nationalism. And he fell in love with Ragusa, where, when he married, he was to settle.

Before that there were audacious exploits. Determined to verify stories of a Turkish massacre, he swam a raging river to reach the murdered village. Having learnt that there were drawings of stags high on a precipice, he climbed to a rock ledge "overhanging an abyss" to copy the "prehistoric frescoes". Action even riskier was to come. He was installed with his wife in a villa in Ragusa, which the Austrians had by then occupied; and he

was writing for the *Manchester Guardian* articles violently denouncing Austria's treatment of the Slavs. Not surprisingly he was arrested; his imprisonment lasted six weeks and ended in expulsion from Ragusa. The resourceful prisoner began by sending his wife a message written in his own blood with a tooth broken from a comb. (It is reassuring to know that later in his incarceration he found time to read Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë.)

Extraordinarily, the epoch-making triumph in Crete, the discovery at Knossos of the Palace and its fantastic treasure, came when Arthur Evans was nearly fifty. He was already an established figure, if anybody as disturbing can be called established; a man in the news and of the news, champion of Balkan aspirations and now, after the Ragusan uprisings, holder of a solid Oxford position; he was appointed Keeper of the Ashmolean

Museum. Then his life broke from its moorings. His wife died. There was nothing to hold him in the routines of a scholar's occupations. He had means, and behind him there was the financial support of his father. He could afford to spend the rest of his life on a fantasy, a dream. He began looking for an elucidation of the mysterious signs which his microscope sight had found on seal-stones from Crete. He began looking for a language. He found a civilization.

The Find of a Lifetime is not a book for scholar-archaeologists. The scholars know it all anyway. But for a clear, accurate and thoroughly readable account of the excavations in Crete, the monuments and their significance, the interested enquirer can hardly do better than Ms Horwitz's book. Everything is here: season after season, year after year, the resuscitation from the throne-room onwards, of the unimaginable past. The language is there on those famous clay tablets, Linear A and Linear B - though Evans was destined never to read them, and it was left to a brilliant young architect, the late Michael Ventris, to decipher Linear B and pronounce it ancient Greek. The frescoes are there, Cupbearer and griffins and the Saffron-Gatherer who was later identified as a blue monkey; and the stairways and the courtyards, the Snake-Goddess figure and the gaming-board - a huge treasury of art and technique.

It has been written about many times before. But Ms Horwitz brings the story up to date: not only the Palmer tray is here with the questioning of Evans's dating, but new finds; not only Zakros but Marinatos's discoveries in Thera; new evidence, new dates, new arguments. In the controversy over the reconstructions at Knossos Ms Horwitz is a shade non-committal. In the wrangles over the timing of the doom of Knossos she is generally on Evans's side. Without idolatry: the portrait has its moments of discretion. But the great scholar-adventurer is there with his soft voice and the courteous command which veiled a patrician arrogance. He was one of the great race of Victorians; and the formidable quality which one felt in his presence lingers on.

Richard Murphy

A home for the repelled

By Peter Clarke

IAN BRADLEY:

Breaking the Mould?
The Birth and Prospects of the
Social Democratic Party
172pp, Oxford: Martin Robertson,
18.95 (paperback, £2.95),
0 85520 468 0

There is an old saying in the Social Democratic Party - it is at least as old as the party itself - that Politics is for People. The events of the past year might suggest that Politics is for Top People, to be fashioned in their own image. For the SDP owes a debt that it can never adequately discharge to four remarkable politicians - one woman and three men - who, through their dedicated fight to uphold their own view of politics, have done so much to assure it of initial success. Their names have been on the lips of everyone, as week by week, they have battled on with dogged persistence, and watched the SDP establish itself as a result of their efforts. I refer, of course, to Margaret Thatcher, Michael Foot, Denis Healey and Tony Benn.

The SDP was bound to emerge in the first instance as a party of "anti". The General Election of February 1974 was dubbed at the time an unpopularity contest. The Liberals' success in gathering votes can be seen in retrospect as an anticipation of the present situation, with the further slide of the Conservative and Labour parties from their 1974 levels of popular support.

The politics of repulsion cannot be claimed as a wholly new phenomenon, but the way it has hitherto operated has usually been distinctly one-sided (though the sides have changed from time to time). The 1922 General Election, for example, was once described as a competition in not being Lloyd George, with Bonar Law as the winner because he was more indubitably not Lloyd George than any of the other contenders. In the same way, it is already clear that in the next election it will be an immense advantage to run as the not-Thatcher. It is quite likely that the voters will identify Labour as, at any rate, comprehensively not-Thatcher. The additional advantage for the SDP will lie in being simultaneously not-Labour either - a truly symmetrical exercise in the politics of repulsion such as has never been seen before.

This may suggest that the SDP is essentially a centre party. Most of its active supporters would contest this and prefer to regard it as accidental, a centre party. It appears as such because a bizarre polarization of extreme viewpoints naturally leaves room for something in between. Roy Jenkins was effectively proposing a centre party in his Dimpleby Lecture in November 1979; and his Parliamentary Press Gallery address in June 1980 called for a realignment of the "radical centre". But Shirley Williams, William Rodgers and David Owen did not rise to this bait. The statement of the "Gang of Three", published in the *Guardian* of

August 1, 1980, consequently reaffirmed "that we will not support a Centre Party for it would lack roots and a coherent philosophy". The self-image of the SDP is thus as a party of the Left, albeit the moderate Left; as a radical party, in the sense that reforming measures are urgently postulated but that the necessity of pressing on to revolutionary conclusions is not acknowledged. The real problems, it might be said, are perceived as structural but not as systemic.

It is apparent, then, that the SDP cannot aspire to span the wide open spaces vacated as a result of the combination of the Thatcher Experiment with Labour Recidivism. For one thing, the Liberals have at various times pitched tents and struck camp over much of this territory - this is Injun Country. Moreover, it might be held that what is really needed is a proper Conservative party (now that the present one has been hijacked for alien doctrinaire purposes), which would offer safe, pragmatic counsels of British common sense. The very idea that Edward Heath, for example, might cross the floor and join the new party is thus a product of muddled thinking. The strictly logical conclusion here is that we need an SDP of the Right.

In *Breaking the Mould?* Ian Bradley has produced an admirable guide to the formation of the SDP. How quick he has had to be can be judged from a few dates. The party was launched on March 26, the preface is dated July 26, just after the Warrington by-election, and the book was published to catch the Liberal Assembly at Llandudno in September. It would therefore be unfair to expect a highly finished or deeply pondered work. There are inevitably some trivial signs of haste in composition. Instead of writing, for example, that the two major parties displayed a "failure to manage economic decline", the author might, on reflection, have conceded that this at least they did manage. The major themes, it should be said, are brought out well, with few lapses in accuracy or judgment. The book offers a well-presented survey of a range of relevant evidence, from important texts to significant opinion-poll findings. Altogether, it is an indispensable introduction to the subject.

If history is any guide, the prospects for a breakaway party are, of course, appallingly bad. In particular, the propensity for centrist politicians to peel away from parties of the Left has seldom made an enduring mark. The Liberal Unionists, despite being reinforced by the forceful presence of Joseph Chamberlain, could not in the end resist assimilation by the Conservative Party. Lloyd George almost suffered the same fate, and many of his Coalitionist followers succumbed completely. Even the prestige of Ramsay MacDonald could not save National Labour from withering away as a

parasitic remnant. The leadership of famous names, with established radical credentials, has plainly not been enough to sustain an independent appeal or to ward off the embrace of Conservatism.

There is, moreover, a stock speech which has always been a favourite of politicians defecting in this way. The Liberals first heard it from the Palmerstonians in the 1840s, and as Liberal Unionists in the 1880s some of them turned it back upon the Gladstonians. The old Liberals flung it at the new Liberals in the early 1900s, and the Asquithians and the Lloyd Georgians rehearsed it on each other in the 1920s. The Labour Party was regaled with it from the MacDonaldites in the 1930s, and the dust has been blown off it from time to time ever since. The notes for the speech go something like this:

deep regret at sad moment - strong ties with party in which brought up - lifetime of service, proud of achievements - great leaders of yesterday (Gladstone/Keir Hardie/Atlee, etc - but now would turn in graves - betrayal of finest traditions - I have not changed, party has changed - heavy heart, sleepless nights, no alternative ...

This speech has usually been followed, at no long interval, by a venomous onslaught on the old party, acting as a sort of purification ritual in which the old self is cast off and the rectitude of the new allegiance publicly affirmed.

It is easy to see, therefore, with the force of historical example and analogy, that the Social Democrats may only be sending up the old cry of wolf. The trouble with historical precedents, however, is that they only hold good so long as things go on in the same old way. This is usually the case, in politics as in other matters. For example, we have always known that the Left may look like winning a majority in France but can never actually pull it off; so among historians the clever money was still on Giscard in 1981. But now and again, things do change, in quite remarkable and unpredictable ways, which only start looking inevitable in retrospect. The last time that the boy cried wolf, the wolf really came, and tore him limb from limb; but very sensibly the historians were too shrewd to be taken in at the time by his feverish appeals.

What grounds are there for supposing that the Social Democrats' breach with Labour may be of more than personal and passing concern? One odd point is that the very language of social democracy is of relatively recent currency in Britain. Shirley Williams has often described herself as a socialist, though in *Politics is for People* she generally speaks as a social democrat. In *Face the Future* David Owen writes of his "initial reluctance to stop using the term 'democratic socialist'" before deciding that there was nothing for it but to "wear openly the label of being a social democrat". For some, therefore, it has been a difficult busi-

ness, getting their tongues round the name proclaimed in their new party's title.

Part of the trouble no doubt lies in their old party's use of "socialism" as a shibboleth. In the Labour Party most arguments have traditionally been conducted by commending one's own side as better socialists than one's opponents. Hence, in the 1950s, Hugh Gaitskell and Anthony Crosland, who were manifestly social democrats, were lured into tortuous attempts at redefining socialism so that revisionists, too, could claim to be good socialists. Actually, it never seems to have crossed the minds of most Gaitskellites that they were anything other than socialists. Democratic socialists, perhaps; but not to admit to the label "socialist" at all seemed perverse, or worse. Vice-catching cannot be the explanation; there was little practical advantage to be gained from being known as a socialist. It may be an example of the British genius for seizing on an opprobrious epithet as a defiant self-appellation - the Old Contemptible syndrome. If the *Daily Express* called them socialists, who were the Gaitskellites to flinch from the description?

The fact is, however, that as an intellectual tradition social democracy has long constituted the main rival to socialism within the Labour Party. It is surely gratuitously confusing to define socialism except in explicit antithesis to capitalism. The central antithesis itself concerns the ownership of the means of production by a particular class under capitalism, and this gives rise to a consequent proposal for common ownership as the fundamental means of changing the way the system works. Obviously there has been much in the Labour Party's policy, outlook, and rhetoric - especially the latter - which has been consistent with socialist objectives. But historically the party has given priority to the persistent piecemeal tinkering of social democracy, not waiting for capitalism to flicker out, nor even having much effect in dousing its light.

Equality has been more directly aimed at within a mixed economy, with welfare measures supplying the means and social justice defining the ends. The trade unions, with their sectional interest in Labourism, generally went along with the social democrats as long as the system seemed to be working, and began to dress up their demands as socialism

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The System

The damned stand over here and watch the blessed Being happy: this makes them damnably wretched. The blessed sit over there and watch the damned Being wretched: this makes them blissfully happy.

These know they are miserable because the others Are obviously joyful: those know they are joyful Because the others are unmistakably miserable. So far the system has proved quite satisfactory.

There seems no reason why it shouldn't work for ever And ever. Punishments would pall pretty soon (Everything happens pretty soon in eternity). Rewards would lose their charm. Then how to tell Which lot was which? Two shades of apathy. But God, who knows all, knew this. What is simplest Lasts longest: the secret of perpetual emotion.

D. J. Enright

once these added up to heavier claims upon the mixed economy than it could conceivably bear. This analysis will, I imagine, be uncontentious. A Leninist would say that the onset of British economic decline marked the end of reformist attempts to prop up capitalism by buying off its natural antagonists. Thus we have an explanation for two phases in the Labour Party's recent history, answering at once both questions: What made the Right run? What makes the Left Troi?

The great theme of Tony Benn's crusade for accountability has been the inalterability of the Labour Party proclaiming one set of objectives in opposition and acting on different priorities in government. This discrepancy, he maintains, has become vexatious and self-defeating, sapping credibility and morale. For almost all of this social democrats can readily agree, though they naturally dissent over the appropriate remedies. Generally speaking, social democrats have found much to commend in the Labour governments of the years, say, 1967-70 and 1975-78. These are, of course, precisely the years of betrayal according to the dominant orthodoxy of the Left. So any notion of the Labour Party learning the lessons of consistency by building upon its record here, and promising more of the same, was bound to come to grief after the defeat of the Callaghan government in 1979. The only terms on which consistency could now be achieved were those offered by the Left. The alternative was that covered by David Owen's seminal concept of "fudging and muddling".

Ian Bradley deftly disentangles some of the threads which were woven together in the making of the new party. He shows that Roy Jenkins's dissatisfaction with the drift of Labour policy was of long standing. The party's reversal of its position on the Common Market after the 1970 election had an important crystallizing effect. It gave the Left a populist cry with which to isolate the pro-Market section of the party. Perhaps it was not the substance of the issue itself but what it symbolized and whom it brought together that ultimately counted.

A prodigy's postlude

By April FitzLyon

STEPHEN HELLER:
Lettres d'un musicien romantique à Paris
Présentées et annotées par Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger
338pp, with 18 illustrations. Paris: Flammarion
2 08 064287 1

"A day will come," wrote Fétis in 1862, "when it will be recognized without any doubt that Heller, much more than Chopin, is the modern poet of the piano." It seems unlikely that the day envisaged by Fétis will ever come now; but a reappraisal of this neglected composer, German by formation and French by assimilation, whose influence has been detected in works of Fauré and Debussy, may well be overdue.

It was Heller's fate to be merely an excellent pianist and a gifted composer in an age of giants. Born in Pest in 1813, he was the contemporary of Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Mendelssohn, and also of brilliant virtuosi such as Moscheles and Thalberg. Unlike them, he was devoid of exhibitionism or any aptitude for publicity, his ambition was limited, and he was something of a recluse. This was probably due to his unfortunate experiences as a boy, when his over-ambitious and insensitive father took him on an extended concert tour, in an attempt to launch him as a virtuoso prodigy. This resulted in a serious illness, much bitterness, and the abandonment of Heller's career as a virtuoso at the age of seventeen. He settled in Augsburg, for eight years, leading a quiet and scholarly life, and contributing to Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Although he had a friendly correspondence with Schumann, they never met: in 1838 Heller was in Paris, took a liking to it,

The term "social democrat" began to be used increasingly from this time on. Dick Taverne, fighting for his life at Lincoln in 1972, privately appealed for Jenkins's support, suggesting that he "could then lead a split away and form a new social democratic party". According to Bradley, Jenkins came to regret not having done so. But, time and again, the "slow movers" were to be proved better judges of the situation than the advocates of precipitate action.

Not until the Labour Party had repeatedly demonstrated itself to be impervious to social democratic influence did the time come for a decisive break. Right up to the end of 1980 there was a gulf between Jenkins, with his centre party proposal, and those like Owen who took a more radical view of what social democracy stood for. Only with the Wembley conference of January 1981, establishing the unions as the masters of Labour's new electoral college, did the doubts fall away. The way the block votes were stitched together to produce this result showed the shape of things to come. So the Gang of Three became the Gang of Four. The Limehouse Declaration — originally drafted by Jenkins — contained a nice phrase dismissing "the politics of an inert centre", and claimed that "the need for a realignment of British politics must now be faced". Two months later the SDP was launched.

Bradley rightly comments that to outsiders "it had been an unaccountable time coming", whereas for those involved "it had all happened with breathtaking speed". Much the same remains true of all levels in the party. It is said that the SDP is particularly favoured in the coverage it receives in the media; but for every story printed there are a dozen unpublished meetings which are actually constructing a broad-based political movement. The impatience with the SDP for not yet having formulated policies, for not yet having established a recognized organization, for not yet having concluded negotiations with the Liberals, is just as much "inspired by the media" as any vaguely attractive image. If only "instant politics" were so easy! The SDP is thus a prisoner of

the very expectations it has succeeded in arousing, and the question of breaking the mould remains an open one.

The alliance with the Liberals is the key to the situation. By itself the SDP makes an interesting showing as a minority party, putting it in the same league as the Liberals but with little hope for promotion. It is when an alliance is postulated that the cracks open up. The story here has been remarkably consistent, before and after Warrington. The opinion polls cited by Ian Bradley are confirmed by more recent findings, notably the MORI poll in *The Times* of September 14. Likewise, the local council by-election results to which he refers can now be supplemented by the useful survey in the *New Statesman* for September 18, which concluded: "Warrington was not a freak: the opinion polls are right: an alliance is capable of doing well in almost every kind of seat."

Liberals and Social Democrats, standing together, seem to have tapped a reservoir of popular support which has been quietly welling up for a long time. The immediate conditions of their present success can hardly be expected to last. Thatcherism may soon be buried, and the Labour Party may have no stomach for the strenuous regime prescribed by Benn. But the deep wounds inflicted by the Thatcher Experiment will not heal quickly, and the reassertion of old-fashioned trade-union control over the Labour Party is merely a recipe for the sort of frustrations. Moreover, there are subterranean springs which cannot be dammed — changes in the political sociology of modern Britain which leave the Labour Party's power base looking like an anachronistic anomaly. The working alliance with the Liberals might never materialize and the SDP could well fall in its mould-breaking enterprise. Historical inertia may prove an all too stubborn antagonist. But it is by no means obvious that things can go on as they are in British politics, and one hopes that a second edition of Mr Bradley's book may yet be needed.

But if love of music has perhaps skipped a few generations, Queen Victoria's great-grandson, George Lascelles, the seventh Earl of Harewood, has inherited it in full. The Duke of Windsor commented to Topazia Markevitch, wife of the conductor Igor, "It's very odd about George and music. You know his horses and dogs and the country! The sixth Earl was thought by many to be a cold, hard man but although it is clear that his attitude towards his sons was somewhat distant, the little author writes about him shows a man of considerable sensitivity and unusual interests. He was able to indulge his passion for collecting old master drawings as a result of a substantial legacy from his great-uncle Lord Clanciarde, just as young George's interest in music began from the King of Afghanistan."

Lord Harewood joined his father's old regiment, the Grenadiers, a month after his nineteenth birthday in 1942 and in his diary wrote "rather too platonically" "End of Civilization". What it seems to have been the beginning of was a series of physical mishaps, some as a result of square-bashing, some of the inadequacies of army catering, taking in minor surgery and bouts of jaundice, pleurisy and pneumonia. Once on active service he was severely wounded on the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo; a coincidence, for his father had been wounded on the hundredth anniversary in 1915, as their ancestor had been at the battle itself. Captured and moved from hospital to prison, he was sent to Colditz and from there removed with a small number of other prominent hostages to "The Final Redoubt". They survived only because the officer in charge chose to disobey the order to execute them, signed by Hitler himself. The story has been told many times before but Lord Harewood's matter-of-fact, slightly ironic account does not detract from its tension. After the war he went to Canada as ADC to Lord Athlone, whose agreeable eccentricities he describes in an amusing chapter.

It is opera, and music in general, which has formed the basis of his life since then. At the Salzburg Festival in 1948 he met the pianist Marion Stein whom he married the following year. This event proved "rather a lot of fuss" but produced the memorable spectacle of E. M. Forster bowing to the wedding cake, having mistaken it for Queen Mary. The diaries of the Harewoods' early travels are liberally filled with descriptions of operatic performances. This makes good reading for anyone keen on opera — near gibberish if should imagine, for those who are not, so Lord Harewood has added a glossary of names at the end to explain to the uninitiated

Liszt's social, rather than musical, successes, although Eigeldinger sees deeper psychological reasons for it. At his best, for example in a letter to Hanslick on Berlioz (written for publication), Heller reveals himself as an astute observer and a good psychologist; but Eigeldinger's claim that he is the best musical letter-writer of the nineteenth century after Chopin, Berlioz and Saint-Saëns is surely exaggerated — what about Mendelssohn and Borodin, to name but two more likely candidates? It is Eigeldinger's wide-ranging scholarship, his excellent introduction and notes, rather than Heller's letters, which make this volume a useful contribution to nineteenth-century musical history. Many of the letters are here published for the first time; those originally written in German are given only in French translation.

John Calder have recently published on behalf of the ENO two additions to their English National Opera Guides. Series 1 (editor, Nicholas John): *La Traviata* (80pp, £2, 0 7145 3848 5) and *Der Rosenkavalier* (128pp, £2, 0 7145 3851 5). Each guide contains a complete libretto of the opera, printed side by side with an English translation; Piave's libretto to Verdi's opera is an English version by Edmund Tracey; von Hofmannsthal's libretto to *Der Rosenkavalier* is translated by Alfred Kalisch. The introductions and accompanying notes place the operas in their historical and musical contexts. April FitzLyon, for example, contributes a note on "Alexandre Dumas and *La Dame aux Camélias*" to the *Traviata* guide, and Peter Branscombe writes on "Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Man of Letters" in the Richard Strauss publication. The guides are illustrated with photographs of notable past productions of the operas. They also include a section on major musical themes, and a bibliography and a discography.

To the royal ear

By Patrick O'Connor

LORD HAREWOOD:

The Tongs and the Bones
The Memoirs of Lord Harewood
334pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £9.95.
0 297 779661 5

Queen Victoria loved music for music's sake, and singing appealed especially to her. It was a joy, a necessity to her to hear music every day and to keep in contact with the musicians of her time. Artists met with the most charming and graceful reception, and the Queen always entertained herself for a long time with them about the works and their performance.

So wrote the famous soprano Blanche Marchesi. Queen Victoria's descendants, or at least the ones who have acceded to the throne, have shown little sign of inheriting her musical sensibilities. Edward VII is said to have had a couch installed in the Royal Box at Covent Garden so that he could lie down during the performance and watch it in a looking glass conveniently angled on the wall to reflect the stage, and when Sir Thomas Beecham enquired of George V which opera he preferred he replied crisply "La Bohème — for it is the shortest I know".

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In *The Edward Thomas Country* (43pp. Southampton: Paul Cave Publications. 60p) W. M. Whitman explicates the work of the poet to detailed topographical descriptions of the East Hampshire countryside that he made his home from 1906 to 1916.

who Ljuba Welitsch or Helen Traubel ("Soprano ample of voice and proportions") are.

Lord Harewood's professional involvement with opera began in 1948 when he became a regular contributor to Richard Buckle's magazine *Ballet*, which for a short time became *Opera and Ballet*. Shortly afterwards he founded the monthly *Opera*, which, now in its fourth decade, has become the world's leading publication in its field. The earliest numbers of the journal (the very first had a livid purple cover with Welitsch as Salome discarding a veil) have a delightful air of confident and enthusiastic freshness. There is an amazing photograph of Harewood looking very young, with the Mayor of Verona and the then unknown Maria Callas, plump but glamorous. This was in 1947 when he made his first summer trip to Europe, which became part of the pattern of his professional life, first as a reviewer of operas and concerts, later as representative of Covent Garden, the Edinburgh Festival, the New Philharmonia Orchestra and lately the English National Opera, the four organizations for which he has mainly worked since 1953.

He writes vividly about the many performances he has enjoyed, especially ones by Callas, Klemperer, the Indian singer Semmangudi, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. The author first met Britten in 1943 and after 1948 when the composer invited him to become President of the Aldeburgh Festival the two were close friends, working together on many projects. There is a whole chapter devoted to this friendship, with many insights into the composer's work on the operas he wrote during the period up to 1964. Lord Harewood also contributes a good description of Peter Pears's singing. It is notoriously more difficult to communicate why one may think a singer is great, than to describe something appalling. Lord Harewood is good at both, and I treasure a review of his of a La Scala performance of *Un Ballo in Maschera* in the late 1960s, in which he described the soprano as "a singer whose involvement in proceedings reached a peak of a sort in Act 2, when she promenade round the gibbet and its surroundings with all the emotion of a hostess showing off her roses after the rain when the slugs are out".

In his evocations of even his earliest moments the ones that spring to life most vividly are again to do with operatic music — his listening to the voice of Chaliapin and to the prelude to *Die Walküre* at the age of six, and his demanding to hear the records again and again. Ever since, record collecting has been an obsession of his — even in North Africa when he was training for the Italian campaign — buying French records unobtainable in England, and later in Naples scouring second-hand shops for early discs while getting over the disappointment of not being received by the legendary Gemma Bellincioni, the first Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Lord Harewood is discreet about his children and his first wife, but writes with candour about his own feelings about the break-up of his marriage, due to his falling in love with Patricia Tuckwell who became the second Lady Harewood. Understandably, he draws not as much a veil as a blanket over his relations with his regal cousins but there are several revealing photographs of royal occasions, the best showing young Viscount Lascelles holding his grandmother Queen Mary's train as she leaves the Chapel at Windsor during the Garter ceremony in 1937. The Dowager Empress of India striding ahead and the train beasts are obviously having some difficulty in keeping step. This book will disappoint seekers after sensation but will give pleasure to amateurs of opera, with its story of enthusiasm rewarded.

In *The Edward Thomas Country* (43pp. Southampton: Paul Cave Publications. 60p) W. M. Whitman explicates the work of the poet to detailed topographical descriptions of the East Hampshire countryside that he made his home from 1906 to 1916.

He just keep rollin' along

By Paul Fussell

JONATHAN RABAN:

Old Glory
An American Voyage
527pp. Collins. £9.95.
0 00 216521 X

Jonathan Raban's crush on the Mississippi dates from 1949, when as a seven-year-old he read *Huckleberry Finn*. In those days he could express his excitement only by turning a nearby Norfolk stream into the great river by the power of imagination. "All through my *Huckleberry Finn* summer," he says

I came down . . . to fish for roach and dace, and if I concentrated really hard, I could see the Mississippi there. First I had to think it twice as wide, then multiply by two, then two again. . . . The rooftops of Fakenham went under. I sank roads, farms, church spires, the old German prisoner-of-war camp, Mr Banham's flour mill. I flooded Norfolk; silencing the landscape like a mirror, leaving just an island here a dead tree there . . . to break this lonely, enchanted monotony of water. It was a heady, intensely private vision. I hugged the idea of the huge river to myself. I exulted in the freedom and solitude of being afloat on it in my imagination.

Thirty years later, he has contrived to float on it actually, travelling down it alone in a sixteen-foot aluminium outboard-motor boat and writing this book about the experience. He began in Minnesota and, many weeks and ten States later, ended in the bayous of Louisiana. During the trip he learned that the river can be a good deal more hazardous than magical, and he learned much about the people who live in the sad, ruined towns along its banks.

The river itself, he found quickly, is regarded as little but a menace by those close to it. In virtually every town he encountered someone whose kin or friends had been drowned. The problem is its unpredictability: calm and enticing one moment (very like the river of Raban's young imagination), a few minutes later it is full of "boils", great inexplicable convex babbings-up, and their opposite, whirlpools, both capable of destroying Raban and his boat in an instant. He begins in the north only with some charts and a store-moist compass and a conviction that it's all going to be great fun. He demands to hear the records again and again. Ever since, record collecting has been an obsession of his — even in North Africa when he was training for the Italian campaign — buying French records unobtainable in England, and later in Naples scouring second-hand shops for early discs while getting over the disappointment of not being received by the legendary Gemma Bellincioni, the first Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

It was a relief to go ashore nightly. Tying up his boat and carrying his suitcase to the nearest road, he would seek out some appalling motel and chat up people in restaurants and bars. The residents of the banks of the Mississippi seem to have changed little since Twain memorialized their greed, murderousness and habit of religious canting. Despite their hospitality ("You English? Shee-it! Come on home!"), they seem almost universally deprived, lonely, nutty and embittered. And violent: we hear of riverside stores selling only two commodities, liquor and guns, and to buy a gun all you have to do is produce a driver's licence. At Halloween, when the children beg for candy door-to-door, one hospital makes its X-ray facilities available to examine candy bars for razor-blades and needles concealed there by grouchy paedophobes. In Louisiana, it is apparently a custom to run over dogs on highways if you can. "People here," Raban is told by a visitor from Tennessee, "they go out of their way to run a dog down. It's a goddamn sport!" And all the while the paper place-mats in the diner exhort one to "SMILE — GOD LOVES YOU!", and the bumper-sticker threatens: "AMERICA — LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT."

As if to cleanse themselves regularly of the spiritual soil accumulated during the week, the locals do a lot of church-going, and Raban found the towns so vacant of other

entertainment that he went to church a lot too. By assiduous listening and anthology of contemporary American religious lunacies and superstitions, from illiterate preachers pillaging the Bible for any substance to eke out their incantatory sermons, all the way down to the view of the man who, believing in "the Divine Pattern", is obliged to adhere to a theory of punishment by reincarnation of "retarded" and deformed persons:

"Look at all the little kids who've got these crazy deformities when they're born. The retardards. Grown men with five-year-old brains. Them mongrels. Know what I mean? There's got to be a reason. I ask myself, what've guys like that done to deserve it? They must've done something —

"I don't see why —

"Because there's an order in this universe, that's why. Don't you believe in the Divine Pattern?"

"No."

"Shit, I do. . . . There's only one explanation for it. It's retribution. . . . Hell, you only got to use your eyes. Look at the people in the streets. They're us: we're living out our lives for the

first time. Then there's them. Reincarns."

As a journalistic collection of data about the American lower depths, Raban's book is of considerable interest, not least for its dialogue, where he seems to have caught acutely the idiom of the American prose:

"Hey, if you don't mind me asking, where's that goddam accent from?"

"England?"

"England? Shit. . . . we had it figured for some kinda crazy town-ass voice —

"('Coon-ass' = Louisiana 'Cajun'. Figure it out, if you can.) But for all its success as an act of transcription, as an artful travel book *Old Glory* does not make it. Increasingly the travel book has been replaced by the stunt book, in which the author depicts himself overcoming, with due complacency, some self-imposed inconvenience. Paul Theroux makes a book out of the stunt of going all the way from Boston to Patagonia by terrible trains — quite a close equivalent, actually, of Raban's uncomfortable, unlikely small-boat passage down the Mississippi. Travel is supposed to result in good books because it's interesting, not because

more than three hundred vultures had assembled, including one huge tippet-face, and a few white-headed vultures which we had not seen before in the Selous, and even two beautiful palm-nut vultures, which may have joined the madding throng for social purposes since they are not known to consume carrion. The first to arrive shared the carcass with hyena and lion, but perhaps these animals were already well-fed, for as the hordes of dark birds circled down out of the sky the carnivores withdrew, and the elephant disappeared beneath a flopping mass of vultures that stained the river sands all around a dark grey-green.

The last, best seventy pages of *Sand Rivers* reports a foot safari, the planned climax of the larger outing. The Warden, Matthiessen and eight novice African porters set out to walk through deep bush, where the only tracks were laid down by passing elephant, without a compass but with an elephant-gun and a shot-gun. Close and sometimes alarming encounters with large dangerous animals were expected and enjoyed; otherwise those days (it is not clear how many) would have been merely proof of impressive stamina. The heat in the Selous is a curse. After four days of it in February 1970 I longed never to return. Matthiessen, who is offhand about tsetse flies, makes nothing of the heat; and the Warden must be impervious since he lived happily for twenty years in that suffocating climate. The man of the wilderness and the man of the world were equals on that trek and became friends.

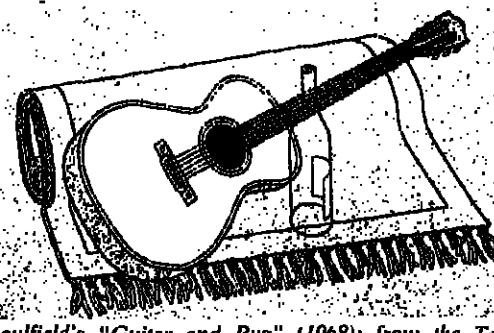
A piece of sickening information: Matthiessen says that the cause of growing wholesale destruction of rhinoceros is a new fashion among rich Arabs for daggers with rhino horn handles. This is far worse than the idiot oriental notion that powdered rhino horn is an aphrodisiac which has hooded the price of rhino horn in Hong Kong higher than the price of pure gold. At the present rate of massacre, that strange, enormous

beast, which long preceded us on this planet and has never harmed us, will be extinct in ten years.

Half-way through this staid, curiously earnest book, I stopped to read again Peter Matthiessen's unforgettable novel *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*. After an extraordinary South American journey and when the experience had settled, where it belongs in the mind's compost heap, he brought out a work of imagination which is fiercely alive, full of terrors, truthts, surprises and mind hilarity. My hope is that Matthiessen will use his scrupulous record of the Selous as compost for an Africa novel to rival *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*.

Hugo van Lawick's photographs explain to the onlooker the reason for the safari-love affair. These pictures are beautiful and magical and give a sense of African stillness and space, of changing, thrilling light, and of the wonder of the wild inhabitants. An impala doe, greenish gold from the reflected greenery and sun behind her, gazes into the camera and the reader must fall in love too. A small stout bird, limned in sunlight on a sun-limed twig, is more moving than the careful naming of many birds. Every photograph shows the enchantment of the Selous, which includes danger as well as delight. One of the most splendid pictures is of an emerald green snake, moving in long graceful curves down a tree trunk to rest its elegant small head on a nearby slab of grey wood: it is a booby and it is deadly. A close-up of a predator (a lioness?) puts us almost into its jaws, together with some other half-eaten creature.

Lawick is abominably served by the publishers: the reproductions look as if they were done on lino and these beautiful photographs are marred by snapshot-sized inserts which are scarcely decipherable due to the processing. Many of the pictures, such as the predator close-up, are not identified. But Lawick need not worry: he is at the top of the tree no matter how badly his work is printed.



Patrick Caulfield's "Guitar and Rug" (1968); from the Tate Gallery's exhibition, see page 1224 for details.

Scouring the Selous

By Martha Gellhorn

PETER MATTHIESSEN:

Sand Rivers
213pp. Aurum. £9.95.
0 906053 22 6

Successful safaris in East Africa are like successful love affairs. Every moment is significant, delicious and fascinating to the participants; onlookers may well feel benevolent but a bit bored. *Sand Rivers* is the almost total recall of a month on safari in the Selous, a remote game reserve about the size of Wales in south-eastern Tanzania. Tom Arnold, MP, organized this particular lavish expedition; safaris, in the European meaning of the word, are usually small and though I rather lost count, I think there were eleven whites on this one, which is a crowd, as well as supporting Africans. Brian Nicholson, who had been Warden in the Selous for twenty years until 1973, was the authority on local lore and the leader.

Peter Matthiessen was apparently awed by the Warden like a new boy at school wanting to get on with the Captain of the House. He repeats Nicholson's talk and anecdotes verbatim. They sound all right but standard for the profession in that part of the world, no pearls of wisdom and certainly not a barrel of laughs. Matthiessen's reverence is puzzling, since his own papers as a hardship traveller and naturalist are in perfect order.

Fascinating day follows fascinating day: every visible animal, bird, reptile, insect, tree, flower, stone is noted by its correct name and described. The roll-call of birds will fill bird-watchers and ornithologists with envy. Opening the book at random and quoting a random paragraph gives a fair impression of the whole.

That night or early the next day, the elephant sagged down and died against the green grass bank between the plain and the white sand of the river, and a day later,

Peter Brent
CHARLES DARWIN
A Man of Enlarged Curiosity

Peter Lewis
GEORGE ORWELL
The Road to 1984

Kenneth Barrow
FLORA
An Appreciation of the Life and Work of Dame Flora Robson

Leon Rubin
THE NICHOLAS NICKLEBY STORY
The making of the historic Royal Shakespeare Company production

Richard Girling
IELFSTAN'S PLACE

Patricia Highsmith
THE BLACK HOUSE

Jaroslav Hasek
THE RED COMMISSAR
Introduced and translated by Sir Cecil Parrott

Heinemann

The giving of offence

By Julian Barnes

ROBERT HEWISON: Irreverence, scurrility, profanity, villification and licentious abuse: *Monty Python: The Case Against* 96pp. Eyre Methuen. £7.95. 0 413 48650 8

There was, until recently, a semi-official One-Nipple Convention among publishers of medium-core sex magazines. The Convention, arrived at after due discussion of *How Far Can You Go*, asserted that the publishers, however gynaeological the innards of their magazines, should restrict themselves on their covers to no more than one nipple. This amount of exposure, they decided, would convey the maximum degree of information to the punter while limiting the chance of offence to the wider public. You could say that the decision - which launched a homogeneous army of pseudo-Amazons on the top-shelf browser - was a typical example of prudent self-censorship, guided by a sharp eye for economics and the swingometer in the jury-room. You could also say that its consequences were ridiculous and bizarre - Pythonesque, as we have now learned to say.

The individual nip and tuck of censorship constantly produces such quaint results. Imagine, for instance, the scene at the Windmill pub on Clapham Common, in 1975, when the BBC's *Head of Drama*, exercised over David Hare's *Brassneck*, leaned across to the playwright and made him this offer: "I'll swap you two buggers for a shit." And even when the victory over censorship has been won, the quaintness continues. Soon, for instance, the Penguin shelf of your local bookshop will be restocked with a new impression of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The cover displays the lambent Sylvia Kristel, former star of *Emmanuelle*, and now embodying a Constance who might not, perhaps, entirely satisfy Richard Hoggart, Roy Jenkins and the other stalwarts of the Old Bailey, 1960.

As long as censorship continues, there will be such dull moments, come-hither covers, and coprolite trade-offs; while the censor himself, simply by addressing himself to the minutiae of his task, will more often than not be turned into a ludicrous figure with a joke-shop nose and trousers at half-mast. The absurdity of the job was partly what brought the Lord Chamberlain's office into disrepute before the passing of the Theatres Act of 1968. But is mere absurdity sufficient grounds for abolition? Should the provisions of the Theatres Act be extended to other art forms?

Robert Hewison's account of the various legal and institutional pressures which have afflicted the *Monty Python* team refocuses the problems without altogether clarifying the answers. The BBC, the legal profession, Mrs. Whitelaw, National VALA, and the Python team itself all emerge tinged with principle; but they also emerge in their different ways as sturdy pragmatists pushing incompatible priorities. The notion that Python's tribulations are all the result of high artistic integrity being thwarted by timorous and prudish officialdom - which the team's fans routinely assume - doesn't bear examination.

Moreover, the issue of censorship is often allied with other questions. Hard though it is for the libertarians to admit, the prime motive may be editorial rather than censorial: "I'll swap you two buggers for a shit" is a perfectly reasonable suggestion if the drama head believes that the dramatist's buggers are producing a false emphasis. It's easy to reply that the dramatist is the best judge of this, and that it's insulting his artistic integrity to suggest he took anything down, but things aren't that simple. Writers are often only half-aware of the effects of their work; and they are all too full-tongued in trying "censorship" when anyone doubts their words. The proper question may not be *How Far Can You Go* but *How Often Can You Go?* Television comedy's daily reliance on sexual innuendo makes one long for

proper critical intervention. Benny Hill's contract, for instance, might be redrawn so that he is allowed only one smirking reference to either the upper or the nether female regions every half hour; then we might see the talents of his script-writers stretched, and Hill might give British comedy less of a bad name in the States.

The *Monty Python* team, who first appeared together in October 1969, have in the last dozen years come up against the four main types of interference identified by Robert Hewison: formal (ie legal), institutional, commercial and self-censorship. They have also scuffled with a variety of opponents: worried and humourless bosses at the BBC; cautious lawyers uncertain of the libellous content of Python parodies; strait-laced managers of record shops and cinemas; American network chiefs and Bible-belt preachers; National VALA and the Festival of Light. They have managed to attract both the disapproval of Lord Delmont and the scissoring of Victor Lowmies (Victor Lowmies!), which must be some sort of record. At the lowest level of irritation, they have found themselves involved in the usual verbal skirmishes - during their fourth TV series "the word 'condom' did not even get to the recording stage" and they were asked to give up four "shits" in order to retain one "bugger" (David Hare might take some comfort from the better rate of exchange he was offered in the Clapham pub). At the highest level, of international law-suits, the Pythons took on the ABC network in a laudable attempt to defend the integrity of their work. Their talent and popularity certainly helped in the winning of some of their battles: as did their common character - Hewison is at pains to stress the assurance of the comics *en masse*.

The Pythons' progress is not unlike that of a barium meal, irradiating the various blockages in the body artistic. Fittingly, this progress has thrown up moments of comedy almost good enough for the original TV series. There was the ABC redubbing of their show in which even the Pythonic euphemism "naughty bits" was bleeped out for being naughty. There was the time when a jumpy BBC management started reading its own extra dirt into the scripts ("the glass of red wine was both to be medicinal blood"). And there was the time when Graham Chapman, entrant in the All-England Sunmarize Proust competition, gave his hobbies as "Golf, strangling animals and masturbation": the final word was wiped from the soundtrack at the last minute, so that only lip-readers were regaled with the full *Who's Who* entry (not that there are as few lip-readers as one might imagine: *March of the Daisies* always gets complaints when it unwittingly portrays some foul-mouthed player verbalising the referee).

The best jokes, of course, occur when the lawyers arrive. Judges ignorant of the Pink Floyd and Sebastian Coe are two a penny; but it's an appalling pleasure to discover that the lawyers whom the Pythons come across - and who are presumably specialists in this area anyway - are a richly ignorant lot. In particular, the concepts of irony and parody seem utterly foreign to them. Hence the Canadian lawyer's painstaking query over *The Life of Brian*: "I am not aware of three wise men coming to visit children other than Jesus." Hence, too, the English barrister who read the *Brand New Monkey Python Book* and commented: "Page 63 (line 13) - A reference to 'the Menubins fighting as usual'. Is there any substance in this suggestion?" Even the wise and humane counsel's opinion of John Mortimer are studied with comical mistyings.

All this unintentional frivolity repeatedly offends a theme which turns out to be much less straightforward than a prejudiced liberal might predict. The Pythons, to be sure, were in one sense free spirits; intent

on adding to the gaiety of nations who were constantly being held back by moon-faced place-men wanting to trade four shits for a bugger. But they were also - they still are - professional entertainers well aware of the state of the market and the half-acknowledged rules of the game. They prudently make cover shots for their films like any other producer. They were quite ready to trim and chop *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* to get the A-certificate they wanted (here they traded any number of shits for an "I fart in your general direction"). Sometimes they even saw the point of the cuts forced on them (as John Cleese did when Lowmies, as producer of *And Now For Something Completely Different*, excised all the Ken Shabby scenes). While it may be a tactical advantage for performers to pretend that they are merely following their own genius, and then claim surprise when someone wants to stop them doing so, there is evidence enough that the Pythons are a far from naive bunch. Terry Gilliam, in the closing words of the book, points up the group's self-awareness: "We've got to maintain a certain level of offence; otherwise we're just entertainers."

The question of the desired - and permissible - level of offence was posed most sharply by *The Life of Brian*, to which Hewison devotes the final third of his book. The film stirred up the Festival of Light, Lord Delmont, Malcolm Muggeridge, Merwyn Stockwood (who assured Palin and Cleese that they would get their thirty pieces of silver), and churches all over the world. At home, though it didn't result in a prosecution, it set off a low-level guerrilla campaign by the Festival of Light which produced scattered bannings and served mostly to show up the anomalies in the British film censoring system.

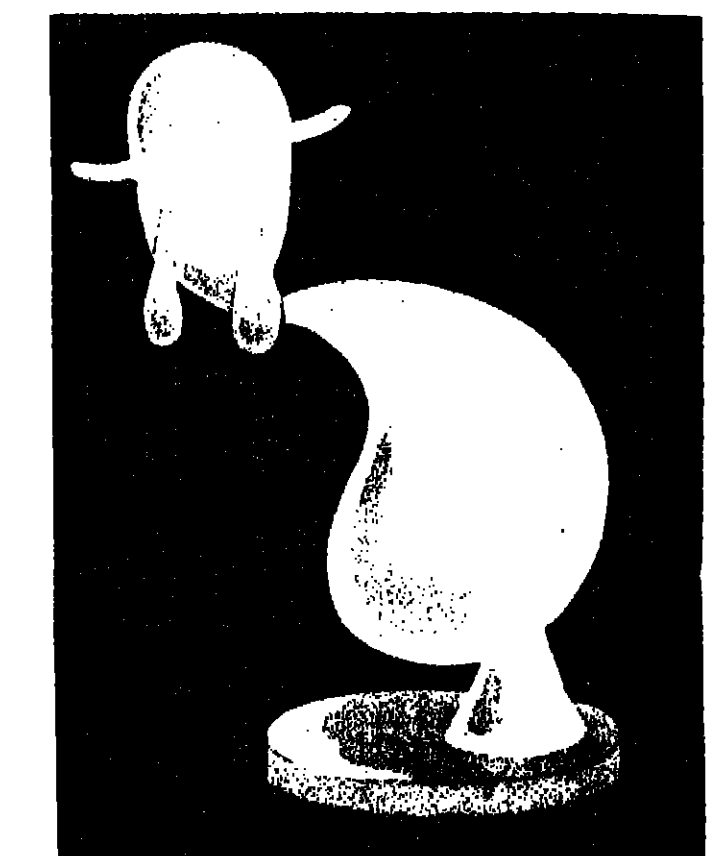
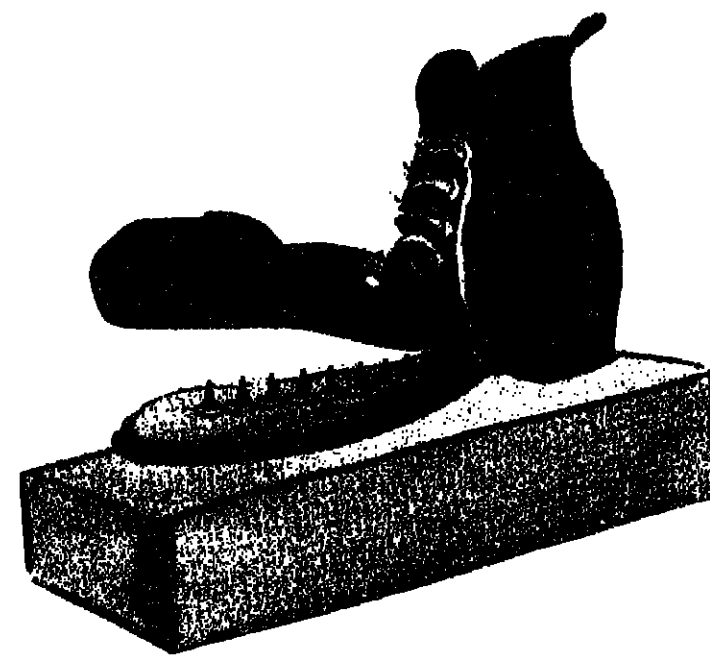
"It is now generally agreed", writes Hewison, "that *Monty Python's Life of Brian* may be outrageous, but it is not blasphemous." One wonders how general this agreement really is, given that the judicial definition of the essence of blasphemy - quoted by Hewison - is "an element of irreverence, scurrility, profanity, villification or licentious abuse coupled with the Christian religion, or any sacred person, or any sacred object." Three out of five, surely? If *Brian* is admitted to be outrageous, what can it possibly be outraging if not the religious sense of those who are watching?

It might have been interesting - if not tactically advisable or legally possible - had the Pythons taken the following line during the *Brian* polemic: sure, it's blasphemous; so what? We did the film because it was a lot of fun, because Eric Idle once quipped that our next project would be called *Jesus Christ: Lust for Glory*, and because if we don't maintain a certain level of offence, we're dead. It wasn't, alas, possible. So instead, all the by-pass arguments which the threat of censorship makes flourish had to be brought into play. There was the argument - taken rather seriously by the lawyers - that the film wasn't really about Jesus, because its main character was called Brian. There was the argument - piously put by John Cleese to Merwyn Stockwood - that the film was "really" about "closed systems of thought". There was the argument that it mocked not true religion, but the distortions and perversions of religion. And there is the rather jerry-built thesis put forward by Hewison himself:

The singing victims of the mass crucifixion at the close of *The Life of Brian* are deeply offensive to committed Christians. . . . In this respect, the Pythons cannot be said to have undermined their faith; if anything, they have strengthened it.

Oh, so that's what they were doing? Excuse me while I offend you deeply for an hour or two - it's just that I'm trying to strengthen your already deeply-held beliefs.

The position is surely simpler than this. *Brian* is clearly about Christ,



At a time when the memorial statue to Charlie Chaplin in Leicester Square, London, had yet to be commissioned, the cartoonist Ffolkes, in the pages of Punch, offered his own suggestions as to the choice of sculptor. They included Duchamp, Arp (above), Calder, Giacometti and Man Ray (top). The drawings are included in *Punch at the Cinema*, presented by Dilly Powell (192pp. Robson Books, £7.50. 0 86051 145 6).

and picks up much of its energy from basic Biblical knowledge shared by the audience (it even picked up its sets from the true faith - Zeffirelli's left-over lot in Tunisia, where he had been filming *Jesus of Nazareth*). It's extremely offensive to many Christians, extremely funny to many atheists, and provokes the full spectrum of response in between. The Pythons are not, one deduces from the film and from Hewison's silence on the matter, "committed Christians"; one guesses them to be atheists. If so, it's a curious situation, that of atheists assuring believers that their film isn't really blasphemous: how would they know? It surely is blasphemous (in terms of practical effect, even if not necessarily in law) if the religious recipient says it is blasphemous: it's no good - and barely plausible - for instance, to Rubinstein Nash & Co. Page two of the letter is half hidden by page one; but at the top the reader can just make out: " . . . are particularly worried by 'masturbators' . . . and the references there to Mr. Alan Brien . . . my Clients that we think it likely that . . . could have an action for damages." There is no reference to this incident in Mr. Hewison's text, though a hand-written Alan Brien to the letter says "Phone Alan Brien". Was Mr Brien phoned? Did he object? Is it, indeed, libellous to link the name of that genial critic to the *Who's Who* occupation of the Proust competitor? Is this the "certain level of offence" which the Pythons have to go on giving? I think we should be told.

Robert Hewison's book doesn't venture on wider questions raised by the Python saga. It is a careful, sober, pro-Python dossier. It's a pity the performers themselves couldn't have been quoted more often, and a pity too that the author is shy of conclusions.

It was the Pythons who showed that it is possible to dispense with

punchlines, and *Monty Python: the Case Against* does not try to invent one . . .

This seems a needlessly modest reluctance on Mr Hewison's part. Perhaps he thinks the available conclusions to be drawn are self-evident. Certainly his bluntest observation that "Adults must be free to choose. The censorship of ideas and information is always unnecessary, and dangerous" doesn't seem to cover all the situations thrown up by his book (for a start, what falls under the heading "ideas and information" - and who decides?). And it also draws attention to a small piece of suppression by Mr Hewison himself. His work, which is laid out in scrap-book form, reproduces on page 33 a letter from Denton Hall and Burgin, solicitors, to Rubinstein Nash & Co. Page two of the letter is half hidden by page one; but at the top the reader can just make out: " . . . are particularly worried by 'masturbators' . . . and the references there to Mr. Alan Brien . . . my Clients that we think it likely that . . . could have an action for damages." There is no reference to this incident in Mr. Hewison's text, though a hand-written Alan Brien to the letter says "Phone Alan Brien". Was Mr Brien phoned? Did he object? Is it, indeed, libellous to link the name of that genial critic to the *Who's Who* occupation of the Proust competitor? Is this the "certain level of offence" which the Pythons have to go on giving? I think we should be told.

Manichaeans of the studios

By Richard Grenier

PETER ROFFMAN AND JIM PURDY: *The Hollywood Social Problem Film* Malness. Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties. 364pp. Indiana University Press. £15 (paperback, £7.77). 0 253 12707 6

WILLIAM ALEXANDER: *Film on the Left* American Documentary Film from 1931 to 1942. 355pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £17.15 (paperback, £7.85). 0 691 04678 6

When the screenwriter Robert Redford was working on Robert Redford's film *The Electric Horseman*, there was no Louis B. Mayer or David Selznick or Darryl Zanuck to report to. No studio chief, no production chief, no story chief. There was a nominal producer and real director and even agents and co-star Jane Fonda out there somewhere in the west Los Angeles area, he knew, but they didn't seem to matter that much in the grand scheme of things. The money for the production had been raised on Redford's name, and it was going to be Redford's film. So Redford went day after day to confer with Redford. The author would lie on the floor (the back trouble). They would toss ideas back and forth. Redford would read what Garland had written, make suggestions, "leave me with the ashes", as Garland put it. Somehow or other the script was completed, and the film was a great success. Asked a year or so later how the two of them had worked the story out, Garland replied with a laugh, "How do I know? I was just the writer. Ask Redford."

On his next film, *Ordinary People*, Redford moved from leading man to director, won himself an Academy Award for the best-directed film of 1980, and, with the cult of the director still at its height, was recognized by both critics and public as the film's auteur. But the fact is that for some years now every film in which Robert Redford has participated has been "Redford's movie". In the American cinema these days, the person in control of a given film is sometimes one of the "glamour" directors or director-producers (Francis Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg), sometimes an independent producer (Ray Stark and more often than not it is the film's starring actor or actress.

And the interesting thing is that many stars these days are mad on politics, social problems, and improving the world. The expression "message film" having gone out of fashion, there is hardly a self-respecting star in Hollywood who doesn't want to make his "state-

ment" (the present preferred term) on this or that social problem. With no studio moguls to hold them in check any more, and subject now only to the public's willingness to absorb their "statements", the actors are unleashed.

The Electric Horseman, although the script is wittily and charmingly written (Garland is modest), is essentially about the debased nature of materialistic, advertisement-ridden contemporary society, which has corrupted the purer values of an earlier America. *Horseman* is Redford's furious condemnation of the American prison system; *The Candidate*, his condemnation of the corrupting effect of the American political process. *Three Days of the Condor* (a resounding box-office failure) is his indictment of the CIA. By the time Redford made *All the President's Men*, Richard Nixon as a political problem had already passed into history, but it is interesting to note that Redford reached the *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein more rapidly than New York publishers, telling them that if they would write it all into a book, he would make it into a film.

Jane Fonda, too, is a practised polemicist. *The China Syndrome* is an attack on nuclear power; *Coming Home*, an attack on the Vietnam War. *Fun With Dick and Jane* is a satire specifically aimed at the "consumer" and "debt" society. *Nine to Five* is her blow for women's liberation.

In Jack Nicholson's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, insanity, as in Ken Kesey's novel, was conceived and presented as an analogue of revolution against a repressive society. Paul Newman's recent *Foxtrot*, *The Bronx*, although its thesis escaped many of its viewers, was a dramatization of the liberal doctrine on crime in its purest form: law enforcement is of virtually no use until the "root" of crime, poverty, has somehow been abolished.

I have my reservations about actors as political thinkers. Although the present President of the United States is a former actor, Ronald Reagan - as everyone knows - had very different politics when he was an actor from those he has now. Henry Kissinger, when he first met film stars, was impressed by their spontaneity and generosity, but less so by their common sense. And the fact is that film stars are probably the highest paid people in America who think of themselves as workers, who feel no identification with authority. They have not risen through any organizational structure. They do not have the "habit of command". They live in tiny rich men's utopias. Their secretaries call them by their first name. Robert Redford earns appreciably more money than the Chairman of the Board of General Motors, but the Chairman of the Board of General Motors

makes decisions affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. Robert Redford makes films.

However this may be, the stars are in the saddle in Hollywood, which in recent years has been producing an unprecedented quantity of "no-holds-barred" didactic films.

One is therefore quite astonished to be told by Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, in *The Hollywood Social Problem Film*, that the great age of the American "problem movie" ended some twenty-five years ago, the House Un-American Affairs Committee hearings and the subsequent McCarthyite atmosphere in the country having instilled a fear of social criticism which stopped the problem film dead in its tracks. It has never, they affirm, recovered its old vitality. Given the wave of radicalization that swept over America in the 1960s and persists in many areas of American life today, including the cinema, I find this view so wrong-minded as to be perverse.

Roffman and Purdy explain away the films of the 1960s and 70s, to the advantage of their preferred decades, by saying of them belittlingly, "Anti-social attitudes become standard, permeating almost all of the films as a natural subtext to the action" - which seems rather inconsistent on the part of critics who are so often aggrieved at the reluctance of even some of their favourite earlier films to attack society's "basic structure".

It is also curious to find the authors, in their concluding chapter, writing modestly of the vintage product:

The problem film is removed from standard entertainment only by its surface conventions of social realism. . . . Nearly every film we have discussed repeats with minor variations the same pattern: arouse indignation over some facet of contemporary life, carefully qualifying any criticism so that it can in the end be reduced to simple causes, to a villain whose removal rectifies the situation. Allusions to the genuine concerns of the audience play up antisocial feelings only to exorcise them on safe targets contained within a dramatic rather than social context.

They quote with approval Michael Wood's remark that Hollywood liberalism of the period, like middle-class liberalism in general, was "all too timid and discreet and all too quickly exhausted". All of which leaves one wondering what was so wonderful about those problem films of the 1930s and 40s, and why Roffman and Purdy are so enthusiastic about them.

The authors must, however, be congratulated on the accomplishment of a true labour of Hercules, on their having seen what must have been hundreds of thoroughly bad or mediocre films - with just a smattering of rather good ones - in order to

chart, issue by issue and film by film, the relationship of Hollywood to the great historical developments of their favourite decades. To be fair, they fully succeed in demonstrating what I take to be a central point: that whereas it is widely thought that Hollywood in those years devoted itself entirely to escapism, it tried again and again (sometimes with appalling results) to engage the major issues of the day: the Depression, unemployment, corruption, crime, racism, even the rise of fascism. Every once in a while, indeed, as much by fluke as by anything else, film-makers of the period seemed to break through the System entirely, giving us *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Citizen Kane*.

The authors are very clear about just what the obligatory Hollywood "Formula" was that the film-makers had to contend with: the clear-cut depiction of good and evil, with a readily identifiable hero and villain; the strict avoidance of complex, and hence confusing, emotion; romance and true love presented as a variant of the good-evil conflict. And of course, the resolution, the celebrated happy ending, in which evil was destroyed and good rewarded, leaving no doubt in the minds of the audiences "that virtue was a positive force and that their fantasies could come true". (Since most of the films the authors admire adhere quite strictly to this formula, one wonders, again, why they enjoy them so much.)

Roffman and Purdy give some choice morsels of film history. William Randolph Hearst - a reactionary, right-wing press magnate if ever there was one and the prototype of *Citizen Kane* - in the year of crisis, 1932, produced a film called *Gabriel Over the White House* in which a hero-president (Walter Huston) suspends Congress and rules by martial law: an American dictator, who has a bust of Abraham Lincoln in his office.

In one of Hollywood's first attempts to deal with Nazism, *Three Comrades* (1938, the year of Munich - Hollywood was rarely premature), F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote a screenplay chronicling in some detail the rise of the Nazis, with street ruffians, book burnings, the "Jewish question". The script was first "softened" by the producer Joseph L. Mankiewicz, then by MOM's chief Louis B. Mayer, who quite incredibly, in what the authors rightly describe as "one of Hollywood's more grovelling attempts to please all sides", actually invited an official from Nazi Germany to view a tentative version of the finished film. The Nazi demanded cuts. Mankiewicz refused. In order to effect a compromise, Mayer called in the head of the famous Production Office who suggested that the film be altered slightly to show the rise, not of Nazism, but of

Communism. In the end, by the time the film was released, Robert Taylor, Franchot Tone, Robert Young, and Margaret Sullivan got through their roles with no references to either Nazis or Communists. That was Hollywood in the brave old days.

The love affair of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Jack Warner is also an extraordinary story. During a two-hour meeting with FDR on a train, Warner, though a Republican, fell completely under Roosevelt's spell, and Warner Brothers became the unofficial propagandist of the New Deal and all FDR's policies. The relationship lasted through the wartime Soviet alliance, in the cause of which Warner made the preposterous *Mission to Moscow* (1943). Stalin is presented in the film as a wise, kind, benevolent figure. The Soviet system is essentially the same as the American. The notorious Moscow Trials are shown to be the functioning of a magnificent judiciary. Trotsky, Bukharin, and Radek to have been truly in league with Nazi Germany and Japan. Secret police repression is demonstrated as necessary and entirely aimed at Nazi sabotage. The best Warner could say to defend the film, in the early 1950s, was that the President had asked him to make it. An indication of just how much influence stars had on the content of their films in those decades can be gathered from the fact that the same Walter Huston who played an American Mussolini in *Gabriel Over the White House* played the pro-Soviet Ambassador Davies in *Mission to Moscow*.

In *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931 to 1942*, William Alexander has chosen a very different subject. If Hollywood was timid and as a general principle tried to flatter as many people as possible, independent documentary film-makers - normally shut out of the big commercial release circuits in any case - were bold and fiercely antagonistic. Alexander, by his own admission, is a 1960s radical searching for parent figures ("political fathers") among the radicals of an earlier generation. He focuses on the film-makers of the "far left", but is also eager to explore the relationship of the "left-liberal" directors with whom they often cooperated. His view as to which of the two leftist groups should ultimately attain ascendancy can be inferred from his statement that social changes "must often be reformist at the outset, and only later . . . can they become class-conscious and revolutionary". The hero of the book is Joris Ivens, a Dutch winner of the Stalin Prize.

Perhaps the best known of the films which Alexander discusses is *The Spanish Earth*, a strongly partisan documentary on the Spanish Civil War. Financed by a group which included Lillian Hellman,

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Yale University Press *New Haven & London* 13 Bedford Square, London WC1R 3JF.

Clifford Odest and John Dos Passos, the film has the unusual feature of a commentary written and read by Ernest Hemingway, but it was actually made by Joris Ivens, so we have the Spanish Communist heroine "La Pasionaria", clenched fist raised in salute, and so on. The film was ultimately shown in four cinemas in America, something of an achievement for an independent film. (At a special fund-raising screening for Loyalist sympathizers at the home of Fredric March in Hollywood, Errol Flynn escaped through a bathroom window - whether to avoid making a donation or to flee the company in which he found himself is not clear.)

Between these two kinds of American films, superficially so different, the Hollywood "problem movie" and the openly propagandistic, leftist documentary, there are none the less profound similarities. Both are didactic. Both are strongly moralistic. Although intended for quite different audiences - mass film-goers on the one hand, potential political militants on the other - they share a pronounced philosophical trait: the decomposition of reality into pure good and pure evil. It is a Manichean world. There are never any dubious cases, any greys, any actions which yield some benefits and some liabilities with a balance to be struck. Real politics almost invariably mean the choice of a lesser evil, but that is not the world we find in these films. Here all choices are clear-cut. No correct choice has unattractive side-effects. Every problem has its perfect solution.

One is often tempted to think that a chief impediment to statesmanship today is that the populations of Western democracies have derived so much of their notion of the world from entertainment media, and consequently have quite unrealistic expectations. Any examination shows this view to be far too able, however, as the values demanded in entertainment clearly proceed from something anterior in our culture, and here, regarding America, I can only join those from Tocqueville to Richard Hofstadter who have found that the country's political behaviour is founded on its - in some cases ancestral - system of religious beliefs.

The bedrock of American religion is not just English Protestantism but that tradition of Protestantism represented by what in England are called Dissenters, the Nonconformist chapel-goers. The thoroughness with which incoming Catholics and Jews have absorbed the habits of thought of these original Revivalist Protestants is evidence of the peculiar dynamism of American society.

Consider an example used by Roffman and Purdy in *The Hollywood Social Problem Film*. In 1932 William Dieterle directed *Lawyer Man*, starring William Powell and Joan Blondell, a prime example of the "stylistic movie", and designated by the authors as a precursor of the problem film proper. Anton Adam (Powell) starts off in the film as a lawyer in a poor quarter of New York, defending the neighbourhood people among whom he grew up. He is tempted by Park Avenue, however, where his attempts to remain honest and idealistic lead to his ruin. Disillusioned, Adam determines to fight back by being as "tough and dirty" as his adversaries, and in the process becomes totally corrupt. The authors explain that "A criminal society demands that you be criminal", adding that films like *Lawyer Man* present "an overwhelming indictment of society".

The indictment, in my view, is less than overwhelming. It seems to me not unreasonable to suppose that the Great Depression heightened the interest of the audiences in gangsters, crooked lawyers, cynical journalists, and various other kinds of unprincipled people, although fascination with gangsters was to be found well before the Depression - witness the huge press coverage of Chicago's Saint Valentine's Day Massacre, very much a phenomenon of the 1920s. But what of *Lawyer Man*'s ending, which Roffman and Purdy dismiss as simply "the Formula"? Adam, they write, "declares that a lawyer is not a trickster for the powerful but rather a doctor and counselor for the poor and helpless victims of the machine. Arm in arm with the secretary, he goes 'back to my people' on the East Side". Although Satan certainly has his innings, I submit that *Lawyer Man* could be viewed as a Christian morality play.

All studies show that, even today, religious belief and practice are much more widespread in America than in the advanced countries of Western Europe. But in my experience, certainly in Hollywood, it is often among the agnostics, the fallen-away Protestants, Jews, or Catholics - people who consider themselves utterly secularized - that the influence of religion on ways of looking at the world remains most powerful.

The "statement" films of Hollywood today are far more radical, if more sophisticated, than their counterparts of yesterday. The Happy Ending and last-act conversion are no longer *de rigueur*. But a high degree of moralizing, and the decomposition into pure good and pure evil to which I have already referred, are intrinsic to them, as in the promise - no doubt derived from the Christian vision of Paradise - that a perfect, beautiful, radiant solution is always possible. Make no mistake: Robert Redford is locked in combat with the Powers of Darkness.

Fatal calumnies

By Jeremy Black

DESMOND SEWARD: Marie Antoinette 297pp. Constable. £8.95.

If a day of power came to the wretched populace, it was not to be wondered at, however it was to be regretted, that they acted without these feelings of justice and humanity which the principles and the practice of their governors had stripped them of.

Shepherd's view of the French situation, voiced in the Cambridge debate on the Army Estimates in 1790, is echoed by Desmond Seward in his popular biography of Marie Antoinette. Mr Seward regards the degradation and suffering inflicted on her during the French Revolution as "the continuation, and, to some degree, consequence of a sinister, carefully orchestrated campaign of calumny" which succeeded in destroying her moral reputation. For him, the villans of the Revolution were the anti-Austrian French aristocracy who fostered false tales about the court. These tales were picked up by Parisian writers, and appeared in print as profitable pornography. Seward is in no doubt that Marie Antoinette was a victim, a victim of French society and of those whom she trusted and loved.

Necker, fat, pot-bellied, yellow-faced, over-dressed, with awkward, oily manners and uncouth habits, was ludicrously vain and had social ambitions. He was the only one of Louis XVI's ministers before 1789 who was not a nobleman, so he bought a title. His wife Suzanne - Edward Gibbon's boyhood sweetheart - held a somewhat louché salon where she acquired a strange if not unflattering selection of friends for her husband.

If a biography of Marie Antoinette has to be written largely out of the resources of the British and London Libraries it is still possible to do better than the somewhat hagiographical bibliography called on here. A perusal of the reports of the British representatives in Paris in the late eighteenth century - such as those of the Duke of Dorset, Earl Gower, William Auckland - and Daniel Haines, all of which are in print - would have saved Seward from some of his many historical errors, as would even the most scanty of glances at some recent scholarly studies of the period.

A regiment for rogues

By Michael Ignatieff

SEAN MCCONVILLE: A History of English Prison Administration Volume 1 1750-1877 535pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £25. 0 7100 0694 2

Sean McConville is a glutton for punishment. This mighty tome is a monument to a long sentence of confinement at hard labour among the dusty, ribboned packets of the Prison Commission Files of the Public Record Office and the serried legions of the Prison Blue Books. As a recently paroled inmate of these regions myself, I must confess to some awe at the author's appetite for tedium. Long and gloomy hours have been spent mastering a bleak science. This volume contains all any mortal should ever want to know about prison diet, tickets of leave, shot-drill, cell ventilation and governors' pay and pensions. Such industry doubtless deserves reward. The volume is as certain to become as near to Holy Writ as the secular canon of English social administration will allow. When the second volume is completed, presumably taking the story from 1877 to the present day, the two great door-stoppers will take their place on the shelves as standard works of reference in the tradition of Leon Radzwinowicz's *History of Criminal Law*. Thesis advisers and examiners can live in hope that, as *point de départ* and court of appeal for all future research, these volumes will cut off many a dreary thesis in its prime.

Having duly praised its scope and erudition, I would fail in my duty if I didn't enter some churchly reservations. The early chapters on the history of places of confinement from the medieval origins to the 1770s depend entirely on printed and secondary sources and thus do not have the means to challenge the Webbs' contention, made sixty years ago, that the pre-Howard prison epitomized the feckless administrative incompetence of the Hanoverian county gentry. John Styles and Joanna Innes have been dislodging this view with local archival studies of the often surprisingly efficient administrative practice of the squires. Joanna Innes argues in fact that the Howardian reform era was not a break with the past but the projection on to the national stage of a tradition of local initiatives by sheriffs and justices which can be traced back to the first decades of the century. This new research is not mentioned in McConville's book, and as a consequence, the first third of it, while improving in detail upon the Webbs' account, does not challenge its fundamental lines of interpretation.

A second reservation, more churchly still, concerns McConville's handling of the intellectual ambience of eighteenth-century prison and criminal law reform. Locke's Second Treatise was hardly the intellectual charter of Hanoverian social administration, and there is not much bite in the observation that the eighteenth century was "the age in which the principles of political economy taught respect for private property". He seems altogether more at home with the jailer's account books than with the philosophical volumes in the reformers' libraries. In fairness, however, it must be added that he is an acute and attentive reader of sources, picking up the point obscured in many accounts, including my own, that Howard himself put very little store in the reformative promise of separate confinement, believing only that it would quarantine first-time offenders from the hardened rogues.

These reservations, however, do not apply to the period which is the main focus of the book: the centralization of the local prison system and the emergence of a national convict prison system between 1834 and 1877. Here he truly is the master, of all that he has surveyed in the dusty avenues of the Parliamentary Papers.

While once again he does not alter the main lines of the Webbs' interpretation, he greatly improves on their discussion of the conflict between interventionist prison inspectors, local magistrates defending their traditional administrative prerogatives and prison governors striving to enlarge their own room for manoeuvre. McConville's best chapter describes the last act of this battle, the attempt by a motley crew of Radicals, Irish MPs and shire Conservatives to defend the tradition of local, voluntary administration against the final Home Office takeover of the prisons in 1877.

In his account of the second major development, the emergence of the convict prison system, McConville demonstrates how reluctantly transportation was abandoned and how sceptical Victorian administrators remained about the reformative promise of penitentiary confinement. There is an implied criticism of my own approach to the emergence of the penitentiary in McConville's presentation, which he is too polite to make, and which, therefore, I shall have to make myself. My own account implied a functional equivalence between the penitentiary and the factory, workhouse and asylum. By emphasizing that the penitentiary was always seen as a poor second best, reluctantly embraced after many a backward glance at the superior advantages of banishment, McConville implicitly shows up the lurking functionalism in my version. He also casts doubt on my emphasis upon Pentonville's regime of religious exhortation as the epitome, in extreme, of Victorian penal ideology as a whole. He shows how soon the separate system chapel and prisoners' masks were abandoned, after the initial burst of disciplinary enthusiasm in the 1840s, and how contemptuous late Victorian penal administrators like Du Cane were about the whole project of reforming through religious exhortation and penitential silence. Victorian Evangelical piety notwithstanding, the late Victorian prison was a ruthless secular machine, resounding to the sound of "short, sharp shocks". In the quarries of Portland prison, prisoners spent little time praying and a good deal more yoked together like oxen hauling granite blocks from the quarry face. So bestial was the toil that some prisoners even chopped off their toes to earn a bloody respite in the prison hospital. McConville recounts these episodes, more easily imagined in Pharos of Egypt than Lord Shaftesbury's England, with an eye for telling detail.

McConville, for the most part, confines himself to narrative but occasionally he concerns himself with a theme. His most evident thematic interest is in problems of staffing - the recruitment of a cadre of gentlemen governors and warders and their moulding into a reliable prison service. The creation of a disciplinary archipelago of prisons, workhouses, asylums and night refuges first entailed the disciplining of the disciplinarians, and in this process, it was the British Army which provided the personnel and techniques of drill and esprit de corps. On the history of this military penetration of the penal system, McConville's treatment excels.

Prisons are not in themselves a dull subject and McConville's prose is clear and sober throughout, but I found his book tedious. It is a work without questions, in a field in which good questions abound. Michael Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, David Rothman's *The Rise of the Asylum* and my own *Just Measure of Pain* may have generated more heat than light, but they did at least set out some new questions about the relation between administrative change within the walls and social, economic and intellectual change without. McConville stays inside the walls, refusing engagement with any of this new historiography. Foucault receives only admiring but evasive footnotes. McConville sniffs the heady glass of French speculation but clearly settles for Common Room sherry.

Doubtless he has decided that Foucault's questions are not his own. So be it, but what then are his? One would have thought that "Who guards the guards?" would figure somewhere in his agenda of questions, but this familiar issue is not dealt with directly in his narrative but only in asides.

Bentham was one of the few to realize that the penitentiary had resolved the problem of "Who guards the guards?" but had instead posed it in a new and intractable way. Its new security rituals and procedures of isolation removed institutional personnel from the scrutiny which they had undergone when a prisoners' relatives and friends had free run of the wards. His solution was to open the inspection tower of the Panopticon to the public. Penal power over prisoners could then be intensified and still be kept under public scrutiny.

As McConville's account shows, however, the centralization of prison administration after 1835 represented a decisive turning away from Bentham's ideal of a transparent prison. Between 1835 and 1837, administrative control passed from the court, in the person of the sheriff and the magistrate, to the inspectors and magistrates of the Home Office. At the same time, as the inmate was coming to be increasingly severed from contact with relatives and friends on the outside, protection of his interests was passing from the jurisdiction of the law to the administrative fiat of bureaucracy. Except for the intermittent intervention of Parliament, the world of prisons has remained beyond the ambit of the law to this day. It was only after the Raymond v Honey Appeal Court ruling of 1976, for example, that prisoners won the right to appeal to higher Courts against prison tribunal decisions, and it was only this year that the Home Secretary agreed to make public the standing orders which determine a prisoner's "privileges" and deprivations. Given the monopoly of power which the Home Office has secured by 1877, it is scarcely surprising that in the century since these prisoners' rights have made so little headway in law, while what Marshall called the civil rights of the working class - rights in respect of employment, organization, injury and retirement - have received formal recognition. Furthermore, centralization has constricted the citizen's right to observe and criticize those who punish in the public's name. If Bentham's proposal to open up the inspection tower of his prison to the passing public still has a radical smack to it in 1981, it is because the history McConville describes makes us think that it is normal for the Home Office to prisons and whose disclosures and criticisms should be threatened with the pall of the Official Secrets Act.

Doubtless these are contentious points, but they are made so that McConville's lulling narrative will not lead us to pass over some of the darker implications of the story he has been telling. No doubt the alternatives to the Home Office monopoly of power are fraught with difficulty. The rights of citizens and prisoners are not easily reconciled with the authority necessary to maintain security within the walls, and there are practical difficulties entailed in giving the public and the courts a watching brief over the day to day struggle for power between prisoners and guards. A transparent prison is an even more easily conceived than enacted. Nor is history able to offer sure proof that prisoners were better protected when their relatives had the run of the yards, and the governors were directly responsible to Quarter Sessions. There is never any clear moral to history's stories, yet a history which at least asks the questions which the present wants answered is likely to be more compelling and useful than one which potters along the lines of serial narrative. In his next volume, as he moves closer to the contentious present, McConville may have to discard his narrative for controversy. No risk of boredom then.

Flourishing fleshily

By A. S. Byatt

A. N. WILSON: Who Was Oswald Fish? 314pp. Secker and Warburg. £6.95. 0 536 57606 6

The convoluted plot of *Who Was Oswald Fish?* concerns the attempt by the ebullient Fanny Williams (owner of a series of stores selling Victoriana) to purchase St Aidan's, a fin-de-siècle Gothic red brick church situated in the middle of a Birmingham council wilderness, in order to use it as a warehouse for Victorian loots. What the Butler-Saws and other delights. She is initially opposed by one Fred Jobling, a Council lawyer, who wants to demolish the church and build a Leisure Centre in its place. She is assisted by Charles Bullockwee, a black Etonian lawyer and surrogate husband, and later by a V & A art historian (picked up in a public lavatory by Charles), a closet queen who is in love with his wife. A Welsh grandmother reads on a train the journals of her father, Oswald Fish, who turns out not only to have been the architect of St Aidan's, which is a memorial to his sensual passion for his sister-in-law, but also, through various licit and illicit amours, the progenitor or ancestor of most of the rest of the cast, including a stoker, a missing Shakespeare who was posted missing at Mons in the First World War and has his hundredth birthday on page 276.

A favourable review of this novel would extol its verbal wit, the flamboyance of its sexuality, the co-existence of farce and tragedy, the polluting variety of classes, sexes, ages, proclivities of its people. Such a review would then go on to make some serious points about the continuities and discontinuities between the religio-prurient sexuality of the

Victorian Fish, and the "permissive society" in which his descendant Fanny loudly, brassy and fleshily flourishes. Besides large male organs, she seems to need Victorian fantasies - the little fat legs of Victoria twined around the Prince Consort - to get her going, and she has a nostalgia for Love and Fidelity. A favourable review would contrast Mr Wilson's sharp insight into the rampant bliss of Fanny, the sexual tedium of the Joblings, and the anarchic-destructive urges of Fanny's knowing children (which cause two bizarre deaths). Love is made by the Albert Memorial; revelations are made in Highgate Cemetery. One could even argue it is a Condition-of-England novel, since Mrs Thatcher and Mr Heath make various appearances and are frequently accidentally voted for, and two dear little corgis are crushed in the final Fall of Oswald Fish's church.

And an unfavourable review? One should never, to paraphrase Coleridge, castigate a book for what it is not, without first ascertaining what it meant to be. "Until I understand a man's ignorance, I must presume myself ignorant of his understanding." I have complained frequently that novel columnists, English and American, have two criteria, plot and character (and sometimes a third, setting) and stop there. This book has a lot of quite well-constructed frivolous plot, even if its characters are rather one-dimensional. That need not matter. But it is not really a novel so much as a sort of candy-floss with a bitter after-taste. A. N. Wilson displays a gossipy, sneering contempt for his world, his characters and his readers.

Henry Green said that ultimately one reads novels for indirect communication with the author's mind. An Iris Murdoch novel contains as many wild coincidences as an A. N. Wilson one, as Angus Wilson novel makes grotesques out of all kinds of people. But Miss Murdoch has a

clear theory of morals, aesthetic and human, and a sense of communication being at best possible, between characters, or between writer and reader. Angus Wilson speaks of comic or farcical writing as controlled or compensated sadism. A. N. Wilson is somehow frivolously merciless.

There are other admirable writers who write merciless farce: Muriel Spark, Fay Weldon, Anthony Burgess. These inflict on their characters blows of fate worse than anything A. N. Wilson can think up - but the opposite, the sense of what is grimly, purposefully excluded from their tragic-farceful vision is never, as it is in his novels, absent. There are also newer writers of black farce, such as Ian McEwan or Martin Amis, who have dwelt on and displayed the ineffectiveness or irrelevance of values like love, pity, communication. But A. N. Wilson does not belong with them either. He does not try, gentlemanly and "witty" as he is, to make you feel sick. And yet his novels are distressing - or I find - for an absence, left at its worst when he introduces random blows - the suicide of the discovered homosexual, the murder of the Councillor, or, in his previous novel, cancer.

We are now inured to sexual licence of any kind. The difference, Iris Murdoch once said, between novelists and pornographers is that novelists do it better. There is something irrelevantly naughty and giggling about A. N. Wilson's sex. We have been there before, give me Fay Weldon. But it is at the moments when his intention seems to be to shock us into compassion that the absence of the life I speak of is most felt. I do not believe he has imagined his incidents through, and I do not feel tempted, or driven, to imagine them myself. He treats life and death with a flip sneer. His reputation is now considerable; I don't quite understand why.

Giant the Jack-killer

By T. A. Shippey

JOHN GARDNER: Freddy's Book 186pp. Secker and Warburg. £6.95. 0 436 17250 X

"The Psycho-politics of the Late Welsh Fairytales: Fee, Fie, Foe - Revolution!" - this is the title of the lecture Professor Winesap has just delivered in Madison, Wisconsin, at the start of John Gardner's new novel; its blend of learned wisdom and obscurity before the colon, and remorseless cuteness after it, strikes a satiric note with absolute truth. How tedious cleverness can be! What aggression lurks in the jungle of academic conferences! "Roses are Red, Ravens are Wan: Colour- Words in Old English." The heart of the boldest sinks as it takes guard to play at them.

Not that *Freddy's Book* is itself anything but clever, aggressive, and to adherents of the Great Tradition, profoundly depressing. Its title virtually promises you that there will be no revelations from the author, and the mere skeleton of the book makes you think of exam questions already in gestation. The first part is a first-person-narrator account of how Professor Winesap is drawn from a lecture on "Jack the Giant-killer" to meet a giant, Professor Agard, a hyperdeveloped, reclusive, snob, tries unsuccessfully to strike up a conversation with him, and then in the night finds a vast pyramidal form, shyly thrusting a typescript forward. The rest of the novel is the typescript ("Freddy's Book") and consists of a fable about a knight who kills the Devil in a sixteenth-century Bishop Brask as he squeals that we need a God and a Devil to know what's right - and freed of that nagging doubt Lars-Goren the Knight cuts the Devil's throat. As he does so, King Gustav ditches politics and

the structure of *Freddy's Book*... "Write on the concepts of gigantism and monstrosity in John Gardner's novels" - "Structure as Fabulation: the Devil in Madison, Wis." Someone, somewhere, is no doubt writing them already.

However, if one can get past the sheer bravado of this book, it is on all the above-mentioned levels completely enthralling. The key to it is the deep-level astuteness of Professor Winesap. He is a campus success-story, aggressive and confident beneath a show of modesty which he is careful to remind people every now and then, is entirely voluntary; full of wit, gregariousness, tolerance, sympathy and kindness; and completely without warmth or strong feeling except a delight in being lionized. Heavy, tall, and "generous of girth", he looks like a kind of giant - but one who is unlikely to meet, in academe, his Jack.

Freddy Agard, meanwhile, is also a giant, but one terrified of the smart hustling world Winesap represents. His fable seems to be about how this world came to be. It is in a way a 1984 story about Big Brothers, and its centre is the political whirl of late medieval Sweden, as Swedish king succeeds Danish puppet, pirate chief collagues with bishop, and the multimillionaires of Lubeck back Popes or Lutherans according to their interest. You can't break out of the cycle, the story says; revolution is the Devil's instrument for stasis.

But the Devil is fomenting revolution in Dalarna because he is afraid of something. The Lapps? The statue of St George? I would plump for King Gustav's interest in cattle-breeding, with its ominous implication that things can be changed. In the final scene in a blizzard north of Jokkmokke, the Devil squashes Bishop Brask as he squeals that we need a God and a Devil to know what's right - and freed of that nagging doubt Lars-Goren the Knight cuts the Devil's throat. As he does so, King Gustav ditches politics and

invents the referendum; the city lights glow; the Renaissance starts. We are on the road to Madison and the institutionalized lecture tour.

I think this is a fable about the rights and wrongs of humanism, and I am fairly sure its tone is unfashionably optimistic. Professor Winesap has no charity, but he is deeply committed to tolerance. Freddy Agard finds no tolerance, but he can go away and write his own book. Nobody in Madison burns witches. And whether all this celebration is right or not, *Freddy's Book* remains extremely funny in its detail and in separate parts, fired by an irresistible impulse always to take the other side. "Giant the Jack-killer: from *Grendel* to *Freddy's Book*." So great is my admiration for Mr Gardner's novels, I could even bear to read an article titled like that; and no doubt one day I will.

Building the Bomb

By Frank Tuohy

THOMAS WISEMAN: Savage Day 438pp. Cape. £6.95. 0 234 01928 7

Thomas Wiseman has chosen the atomic research centre at Los Alamos as the setting of his new novel. The period extends from 1943 to 1946; his characters are members of the team of scientists developing the first bombs, their wives and children, and the military and security officers engaged in keeping the project secret. Most important among those present are the two disciples of old Professor Hoffmannsthal, Bamberger and Hepler, friends and rivals from early days, both of equal brilliance and renown: "intellectual giants - the philosopher kings - of our age".

Bamberger is American, tall, distinguished-looking, a man of apparent integrity and fastidiousness, but he is compromised by a past association with members of the Communist Party. Furthermore, he is assailed by profound doubts about the morality of the atomic project and its continuance into peace time. Bamberger is married to Helen, a great beauty, "a journalist of quite intimidating cleverness". Hepler is a Viennese refugee, short in stature, energetic and abrasive in manner. He is unattached, but extraordinarily successful with women, including Helen Bamberger. He suffers no qualms about continuing experimentation towards a super-bomb. In the event, one of these experiments leads to his death.

Apart from the rivalry of Bamberger and Hepler, a variety of intrigues shakes what is inaccurately referred to as "the small incestuous community" - no blood-relationships are involved. There is the problem of security leaks, which may or may not be connected with mysterious deaths and disasters. Everyone feels threatened. Meanwhile, outside the fence in New Mexico, a dark and confusing story of strife between missionaries, Amerindians and a surviving group of flagellants waits to play its part in the final unravelling.

The first section of *Savage Day* takes place in July 1945, with the explosion of "Fat Man", Bamberger's recollection of the phrase from the *Bagavad-Gita*, "I am become Death, the destroyer of Worlds" and the beginning of doubts about his loyalty. We then move on a year, to Hepler's death in a laboratory accident, the investigation on detective story lines, and Bamberger's discovery of his wife's diaries, admitting in great detail to her affair with Hepler. Part Three is Helen's diary, and subsequent sections deal with further murders and the final clarification of the mystery behind them. As happens with even the most distinguished thrillers, the author has been so careful to avert suspicion from his villain that the reader is forced to

leap back to earlier chapters to find out who he is.

But *Savage Day* is not a distinguished thriller. It attempts to be more than that, and achieves a good deal less. It tries to combine a study of a scientific community at an historic moment with a look at treachery among the intelligentsia, and a fairly routine detective story with a first-hand account of erotic obsession. Unfortunately these themes are handled with a combination of ineptitude and vulgarity, which it may be worthwhile trying to disentangle.

These atomic scientists are seen in action only during the routine experiment which causes Hepler's death. Many novelists have managed to convince non-scientific readers with such scenes. Here, every cliché brings Walter Mitty's refrain "Ter-pocketa, ter-pocketa" to mind. The discussions reported in Helen's diaries are of a sophomoric banality. It is harder than it may seem for non-American writers to fake American colloquial speech, with all its long-established varieties of phrasing, rhythm and intonation (David Lodge's *Changing Places* is a rare example of complete success). If, as seems to be the case here, the writer copies the dialogue of TV serials, he will be left with a good deal of exposition and no individual idiom. He will be reduced to padding his narrative with that most irritating trick of making his characters ask themselves silly questions ("The day done, dozens of these experiments, hadn't they? And nothing had gone wrong.")

In Helen Bamberger's diary, some approximation is made to translational usage. She describes a local settlement as "a viable village, with its unique life-style" and she employs words like "anorectic" and "simplicitic" - locutions hardly likely to be current in 1943. Elsewhere, in a memorable phrase, she speaks of New Mexico's "lucid light".

These days, an indictment of vulgarity is hard to phrase: it is in the nature of such accusations that the accused will be unaware of what is meant by the charge. I would suggest something like this: There is a fashion around for putting real people into fictional frames, talented writers have done this. But, at the point where it slips over into exploitation, vulgarity is the result.

Author's Note: "Because characters... sometimes may bear a resemblance to real-life personages does not mean that I intend to depict real people." The problem here is that, since he utterly fails to portray his characters as "philosopher-kings", we are left with their more shameful aspects. Since, as I have shown, he quotes the actual words of some historical figures, he still means us to make the connection. Those who tell scandalous gossip about people they don't know, such as TV announcers, seem to me to be vulgar. The same is the case here.

The erotic scenes here also seem to me to be vulgar. Our parents called such episodes "unnecessary", though they are not. But they must occur in dramatic context and be of psychological relevance to the individuals who are involved. Here we have only the vulgar stereotype: high-born beautiful lady, man prodigiously endowed but ugly, since women of course are indifferent to men's looks (if there was ever a scintilla of truth here, it has been invaluable to pornographers). The woman is duly abused (dogs are mentioned) and admits she has never dreamed of it. The crux of the matter, as has so often been pointed out, is the male writer squeezing himself into what he imagines to be the physical consciousness of a woman: an act by which he forfeits any authority but that of fantasy.

W.S. Gilbert said of Tree's portrayal of Hamlet that it was "funny, without being vulgar". He did not suggest that the two qualities were mutually exclusive. Dr *Strangelove* was a long time ago. If the Manhattan Project is to be treated, surely it should be done by someone who is both vulgar and funny. An opportunity, perhaps, for Mel Brooks?

Anthony Thwaite

Now and Then

How difficult now is: Then sits up, spills over With unstoppable memories, Or - if to come - is a hill In the distance under a cover Of cloud, unseeable And yet predictable.

Now is the point of the pen Making a single mark And hurrying on, till then Is the whole page covered, Or the page covered tomorrow After the passing dark, The plough passing over the furrow.

Travelling on paper

By Janet Morgan

Passenger Timetable: Great Britain - Continent of Europe: Summer 1981. 257pp. British Railways Board. 80p.

Passenger Timetable: Great Britain: 1 June 1981 to 16 May 1982, with leaflet giving alterations from 1 June 1981. 1,281pp. British Railways Board. £2.90.

A. W. HOBSON (Editor): Trains of Thought. 128pp. George Allen and Unwin. £9.95. 0 04 385081 2

Here is a (timetable) not so much for travellers ("Do you use it for your own journeys?" asks the incredulous European Rail Passenger Minder, on the inside back cover) as for practised browsers. (If you are in the trade to what extent does it meet your needs in terms of ease of reference, accuracy, comprehensiveness, etc?). Department TT is hungry for refections. "What do you think of the size of the book?"; and cynically, "Is there any information that is definitely lacking? What new destinations are desirable?" (They surely can't mean it.) Most novel-gazing of all, Department TT invites us to say whether "the new format is adequately explained", so here goes.

"What's new with the timetable", states (there is no question-mark) a jocular headline. "Research told us that people thought our International (i.e. Continental) Timetable was hard to read and did not suit their needs." (But was the grammar smoother?) "We decided, therefore, to break away from the traditional style and to give the timetable a complete new look." Indeed they have. The new version is printed in large clear type on paper that no longer resembles something made of reconstituted railway tickets. The pages are generously sized; last year's timetable looked mean and crowded. The 1981 timetable is two and a half times the length of its predecessor. This is not just because British Rail's European Rail Traffic Organisation ("ERTO" for short) says a winsome parenthesis has taken space for full-page advertisements: "PARIS, from £4, by train and ship from the Greater London Area"; "Don't scull across from Skegness. Hover out from Dover" (and note, incidentally, the amendments to the Skegness Service in the 1981 Great Britain Timetable, Alterations leaflet).

The greater length is also explained by the fact that the new

timetable has 113 tables, even though Tables 9-19 are missing, whereas the old one had thirty-six or so (difficult to calculate, since they were confusingly labelled M1, M2 and so forth). Why there are so many more tables for 1981-82 is a puzzle; it is probably because the timetables are less dense. For example, Table 52 in the new edition tells you how to get from Osnabrück to London, via Harwich Park Station, and the entire table begins at Hamburg (Altona or Hauptbahnhof). In the old edition, however, Table R also includes the journey from Stockholm to Hamburg, even before Osnabrück is reached, while Table O takes in Moscow, Warsaw (Gdansk) and Berlin Zoo. In the new timetable there are separate tables for journeys from Berlin Zoo to London, not, however, embracing Hamburg or, for that matter, Osnabrück, i.e. the expanded version does not clutter the tables with irrelevant destinations - and is thus much easier to follow.

What is more, the index lists stations in alphabetical order: Aix-les-Bains, Brive-la-Gaillarde, etc. rather than country by country, as in the 1980-81 edition. Presumably most passengers wishing to alight at La Tour de Carol-Enveit realize that it is in Spain but any who do not will be able to look it up under L in the new edition. In the old one they would have been obliged to search country by country - and even so they would not have found it, since the Paris-Alicante trains appear to rush straight through.

The old timetable does, however, indicate the mileage between stations (thus La Tour de Carol-Enveit lies somewhere in the thirty-one-kilometre stretch between Port-Bou and Plats), the new edition omits this information, as if to suggest that modern train technology has annihilated distance, or, more plausibly, to deprive the reader of the knowledge of how fast the train is going.

In compensation, the 1981-82 edition presents at the beginning of each regional section (Scandinavia, Finland; Eastern Europe; Switzerland, etc.) a stylized map of countries, frontiers, routes and interchanges, points of the sort which joggers call decision trees. This shows, for example, that there are at least seven ways to reach St-Herogenbosch but only one to Arlon Stenpenich or St Raphael-Valescure. As in the old edition, by the way, it seems that no clear principle has been applied in deciding whether to name places in their local spelling (Dunkerque; Athine; Pado-

va) or in the English equivalent. Each edition sensibly gives both (Bucaresti, Bucharest; Belgrade, Beograd; and, unnecessarily, Crefeld, Krefeld; Gineva, Genève).

Where the new timetable scores mightily is in the presentation of its material. Compare, for instance, the information on Official Time. The 1980-81 version gives a list of countries, bracketing them where they share, say, Eastern European Time until September 27 and from April 5 and Central European Time from September 28 to April 4, with a footnote explaining that Eastern European time is two hours in advance of Greenwich Mean Time. The 1981-82 edition first sets out the problem and gives an example: "A Jetfoil crossing from Dover to Oostende appears to take 2 hours 40 minutes, whereas in the opposite direction it appears to take only 40 minutes. Belgium is one hour ahead of this country during the summer and therefore the crossing in fact takes 1 hour 40 minutes." The example would have been clearer if the phrase referring to the Belgian advance had been tidied up and the words "in either direction" added at the end, but at least the reader has some idea of the nature of the problem. He is next given drawings of four clocks. Central European and British Summer Times are set at one, Eastern European Time at two, Moscow Time at three and Moscow Summer Time at four. Beneath each clock are listed those countries in the time zone in question. The fact that the 1981-82 timetable is to have a summer and a winter edition makes things easier for the compiler; they have solved the problem of Malta (Eastern European Time until September 20 and from April 19, Central European Time September 21 to April 18) by leaving it out altogether - in any case, no trains leave or arrive there, nor did so in 1980-81.

The tables themselves, are excellently laid out. This is one sphere in which the presence of footnotes at the bottom of the page is to be deplored, not applauded, and in the 1981-82 edition almost every footnote has disappeared. Instead a system of headings is used. At the top of each vertical column giving the times of arrival and departure there are appropriate symbols - beds with blankets (sleepers) or without (couchettes), squares with knife and fork (tray meals, in France "usually only available in the first class accommodation") or a glass (buffet service of drinks and cold snacks; applicable to British Rail only), ELT (air-conditioned electric train with S

supplement payable), or a bus (service provided by road - mostly applicable in Great Britain). Where there are alternative ways of reaching the same destination the tables are divided vertically, so that each service can be studied separately. Gone are the squiggly lines and rows of black squares, the bracketed routes and inches of general notes, the warnings at the foot of each page about extensive engineering work undertaken at weekends.

No, not quite gone. Look at the hefty Passenger Timetable for Great Britain (Inter-City, local and suburban services, Irish, Channel Islands, coastal services) for a reminder of what dispiriting reading British Rail can supply. Back to muddy type and cramped entries, pages of stuff about seat reservations and sleeper services even before the tables themselves are reached, quantities of footnotes on the lines of: "b. Arr. 3 minutes earlier; c. Arr. 4 minutes earlier; x. Stops to set down only till 2 October; Fishguard Town (The Square). By Richards Bros. (Bus times are shown for guidance and connections are guaranteed. Through rail tickets are not valid. Compare the European Timetable Table 6, which declares, rejoicing, "A free bus service is provided from Paris Bercy to Paris Lyon.")

Then there are the alterations, published and distributed with the timetable itself but "made since it was printed". A good many of these are instructions to delete forks in circles and insert cups of tea, or, worse, to delete cups of tea. Several pages read like this: "Timetable page no 1166, Table 17 35; SO Glasgow Central to Largs convey, position (dated) for Ardrossan HBR. Saltcoats depart 17.47 as shown. Ardrossan South Beach arrive 17.50 dep. 17.55. Ardrossan HBR arr. 18.04. Largs portion departs Ardrossan South Beach 17.56. West Kilbride 18.04. Fairlie 18.10. Largs arrive 18.19." Of course it is a complicated business to devise a timetable but this presentation is lamentable. At least there is a glimmer of hope on page 5 of the main volume, which announces Talking Timetables for certain Monday to Friday Inter-City Services (but at Oxford the tape recording sticks) and the information available in the Post Office's Prestel System (Key 22124 for British Transport Hotels, "including Blue Moon conferences"). But until the information revolution arrives, British Rail would do well to spread the good practice of their European Timetable and clean up the domestic one. The

European edition is certainly a splendid improvement, but why should the frightful standards of its predecessor and its neighbour have been accepted as inevitable?

Perhaps it is because most of the people who study timetables are either "in the trade" and just get on with it, or have at the back of their minds the beauties and curiosities, if not of the journeys listed therein, of the trains which travel those routes. We must abandon hope of an immense steam revival but, as *Trains of Thought* reminds us, even a Derby class 116 dmu (diesel multiple unit) or a four-wheeled diesel-hydraulic (Thomas Hill no 166V of 1966) is inspiring, seen in the right light and captured with an appropriate lens. This volume contains 230 photographs taken in the middle to late 1970s by members of the Phoenix Railway Photographic Circle, "founded in 1970 from the cream of active railway photographers". The Circle's intention is to take railway photography "into a fuller and more vivid re-creation of the experience of contemplating railways and also, sometimes, into the realm of art". Sappy though this sounds, it is frequently true. The photographs, grouped into sections on Watersides, Arches, Mist, Snow, Stations, Sidings, Watchtowers, Travellers and so on, are often very beautiful. T. G. Flinders' picture of a freight train pulling through the snow past Tolley Tunnel East signal box, E. C. Sallhouse's photographs of the south-bound freight heading over the River Wear in the dusk, and Les Nixon's example of an unidentified class 45 passing a power-station, the picture framed by branches and leaves, are extremely moving. These railway photographers are a romantic bunch, as their captions show: "The evening sun catches a class 101 dmu as it leaves Machynlleth for Aberystwyth; a breeze caresses the railway embankments near Mossley as the 14.47 York-Liverpool sweeps by; a Redhill-Reading dmu heads into the setting sun."

This is much more stirring than a timetable; could not British Rail commission the Phoenix Circle to illustrate some of their forthcoming publications? Rather than appending a footnote, to London Waterloo via Richmond (see pages 820-21), for example, they could insert Mike Esar's shadowy photograph of "a waiting off-peak passenger on a sunny but cold day at Barnes". Or instead of a capital A, a cup of tea, and italics, we could have Larry Goddard's view of a class 24 climbing past Old Colwyn "on the up line, in stormy weather on August 9 1979". There is great scope here.

When Vaughan writes of such matters as the intricacies of the now discontinued slip-coach process he is at ease with his technicalities. His dialogue is less easy, perhaps because much of it is used to convey instruction, and spoken words are apt to sound stiff. When finally Vaughan graduated as a signaller he found himself in command of his own sign, and he both deserves and appreciated his responsibilities. The great main-line trains now run through many grass-grown mounds that were once the junctions from which branch lines carried life to the countryside. If, to quote Flinders and Swann, we are no longer assured to stand well clear of the doors "as the slow train leaves the station, it is good to have so much of recent railway legend recorded.

The place of genius

By Paul Smith

THOM BRAUN:
Disraeli the Novelist
149pp. Allen and Unwin. £10.
0 04 809017 4

"When I want to read a novel, I write one." Disraeli's lack of interest in other people's works - he seems not to have bothered to read even Dickens - puzzles Thom Braun. Yet it is not really surprising when one considers the function novel writing performed for Disraeli. He was not greatly concerned about literature or the writer's craft in themselves; he used both as a means in that conscious elaboration of a personality and a role which enabled him to live his life on emotionally and aesthetically acceptable terms.

It would be unfair to say that Braun has no perception of the often crude functionalism of Disraeli's novel writing. His book is avowedly an attempt to examine not the novels as such (only *Sybil* is discussed at length) but their relation to "a career which was dependent, in several senses, on a fictional view of life". He notes Disraeli's "unrelenting effort to categorise a literary and heroic tradition within which he might place himself"; and regards his endeavour in *Tancred* "to vindicate and rationalise his own Jewish descent and his adopted creed" as "not the only example of Disraeli constructing a philosophical and historical framework so as to be able to assimilate his own position". On the whole, however, he is reluctant to accord the novels too instrumental a role and too precisely conceived a purpose in their author's progress.

Disraeli himself, of course, left very explicit guidance as to what his novels represented. The early works were "the secret history of my feelings" - the "active and real ambitions" in *Vivian Grey*, the "ideal ambition" in *Alroy*, the "development of my poetic character" in *Contarini Fleming*. The "trilogy" of the 1840s was held up in the general

preface to the collected edition of the novels in 1870 as a progressive treatment of the political, social, and spiritual condition of the English nation. Braun may be right to approach these posterior schematizations sceptically, but he makes it very hard for the reader to discern what, if anything, he wants to be put in their place.

Much of his discussion, so far from drawing tighter the bonds between Disraeli's novel writing and the rest of his career, seems designed to loosen them, on some unstated premise of the relative autonomy of literary creation according to which the internal logic of its processes overwhelms any ulterior purpose or external influence. Perhaps this stems from an understandable reluctance to see historians take over English literature or from a reaction against the notion that fiction is written by the Zeitgeist, or by social strata, with the author obligingly holding the pen. At any rate, Braun is strongly resistant to any reading of the novels which would see them in an instrumental rather than an independent light or make them simply the vehicles of ideological contrivance. This comes out forcibly in his treatment of *Contarini Fleming* and *Sybil*, on which the claim that Disraeli invented the "political novel" usually rests.

Braun is anxious to deny that these two works constitute either separately or together a systematic expression of political doctrine. In them, the novel form "allowed Disraeli the chance to voice views which were not necessarily complementary, or which did not logically contribute to a coherent thesis"; they are novels of paradox, of unresolved paradox, "not propaganda in that they do not require any synthesis of their disparate views", and we should see them as "further expressions of Disraeli's imagination, his infatuations, his eccentric ideas and his idiosyncratic style". *Sybil*, in particular, fails to produce a clear resolution of the problem of reconciling modern trends with the author's "ancient values". Braun apparently regards the "two nations" theme as little more than a constructional device; Disraeli's concern was "as much for

interesting characters and perennial truths as it was for social dichotomies", and his "view of the human condition... is ultimately more significant for an assessment of the man as novelist than is any attempt to construct a philosophical and political synthesis through fiction". Perhaps, it is suggested, the term "political novelist" is a simple oxymoron.

So far as this amounts to an interpretation of Disraeli as novelist - and Braun's circumambulatory style, short of definition and decision, leaves his overall view indistinct - it is surely one which holds the life and the literature too far apart. Disraeli was concerned not with the human condition but with his own, and wrote first to determine who he was and second to establish a viable role for himself in English society (not too much importance should be attached to the fact that he needed the money as well). The novels were an integral part of the effort of a baptized Jew of high powers and unbridled craving for recognition to identify his nature and destiny, demonstrate his "genius", and impose himself on an environment more resistant than is always understood. Braun shows little sensitivity either to the shape of the problem or to its compelling influence on Disraeli's writing; he seems not to have read commentators like Isaiah Berlin and Philip Rieff and virtually ignores Disraeli's Jewishness, as though it had been washed out in the font of St Andrew's Church in 1817.

Nor has he gauged the character and function of the romanticism which for Disraeli was not a mere fashionable mode of feeling and expression but the endorsement of his sense of election and the necessary key to the resolution of the internal tension between his aspirations and his prospects through the power of the romantic vision to transcend mundane reality and modify the terms of relation with the external world. It was the combination of the Jewish and the romantic standpoints that gave Disraeli what he himself called a "continental" and "revolutionary" mind - a claim which Braun, like Robert Blake, ignores, because the tools which he brings to

the analysis of Disraeli give him no means of understanding it.

It is not enough to see the early novels as a re-ordering of youthful experience. Disraeli's retrospective attempts to give "form and purpose and direction to parts of his life which were more often dictated by fortune and fancy". They were also a kind of workshop of the personality, a sometimes frenetic effort of role-playing designed to explore the possibilities of being in their author and to materialize his true nature, conducted in front of an audience which was needed both to accommodate the instinct of theatrical performance and to meet the overheads of pseudo-Byronic living, but was kept at a safe distance from the ego in course of definition by a use of irony perhaps more characteristic of continental than of English romanticism. Braun shows less insight into what was going on here than did Daniel Schwarz a couple of years ago in *Disraeli's Fiction*. He is not helped by his failure to explore the idiom which Disraeli is employing, and his lack of interest in influences and antecedents seems an abdication of critical responsibility when it leads to a discussion of *Contarini Fleming* which ignores the *Wilhelm Meister* parallel acknowledged by Disraeli himself in the preface of 1845. *Contarini*, as both Heine and Milman recognized, was "very German", and recent research has suggested the impact on Disraeli of the world of thought and feeling revealed to English readers by Madame de Staël.

By the time of *Contarini Fleming* and *Alroy*, Disraeli was turning from his special brand of exhibitionist introspection to the vindication of his genius in action, and therefore facing in acute form the problem of reconciliation to the external world. The romantic hero, for all his connotations of outsider and subversive, had to be received in place and time; genius could be effective, or at least recognized, only when properly situated as a *genius loci*. The continental and revolutionary mind had to make England its home. This entailed some spectacular furniture shifting. To make the career he hoped for, on terms both intellectually coherent

and emotionally satisfying, Disraeli had to direct the force of the romantic imagination not simply on himself but on his surroundings, and to fashion an interpretation of English nationalism and political history within which he could plausibly bid for the leading place. It seems perverse for Braun to derogate *Contarini* and *Sybil* as political novels because they provide no systematic analysis of or prescription for the country's ills; their logic is not internal but external, the logic of their creator's needs and purposes. Braun notes that *Contarini* is about "national character", but dismisses Disraeli's discourse on the Jews as seemingly "peripheral", when it is central to the concern to vindicate the claim of a Jew to act as prophet to the new English generation, the interpreter both of its historic past and of its future mission.

Even more central to Disraeli's need to insert himself into the scheme of English national development (as well as to synthesize the diverse elements of his own identity) was his celebrated insistence in *Tancred* that Christianity was simply completed Judaism. Puzzled by his determination to express views which were likely to damage his newly won political position, Braun decides that "the fact that much of the novel is set in a distant geographical locality meant that it was to a certain extent distanced from Disraeli's political career". In reality the highly controversial ideas blazoned in *Tancred* and repeated in *Lord George Bentinck* were essential to Disraeli's political career, despite the harm their author knew they could do it in the short term, because they made a kind of artistic sense of it. It was only as the descendant of a natural universal aristocracy, an "unmixed race of a first-rate organization", which had given England, indeed western Europe, all of its religion and most of its civilization, that he could sustain a title to lead the dukes and squires which left his personal identity more or less intact.

Disraeli enjoyed bewildering the critics. Here, as in his novels, now you see him, now you don't; but mostly you don't.

The member for Bristol and Malton

by John Brewer

PAUL LANGFORD (General Editor): The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke Volume 2: Party, Parliament, and the American Crisis 1766-1774. 508pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £40. 0 19 822416 8

Burke scholarship, like Lewis Carroll's White Rabbit, has a way of repeating itself. In his own lifetime Burke's friends, enemies and critics raised what have become the perennial questions: was the member for Bristol and Malton a philosopher - good or bad, consistent or contradictory - or merely a party hack "whom devotion to party", Bentham claimed, "reduced to that species and degree of servitude, with which sincerity is incompatible"? Did Burke have the brilliance seen by Johnson - or was he the windy orator with "a great deal of flower, a great deal of leaf, and a little fruit" described by David Hume? And were his final writings on the French Revolution the gothic ravings of a man whom Horace Walpole, along with a stable minority of the House of Commons, believed to have lost his reason, or were they, perhaps, the pinnacle of Burke's intellectual endeavour?

These questions were vehemently debated anew in the nineteenth century literary and political periodicals. Scarcely a number of *Blackwoods* or of the *Quarterly* or *Edinburgh Review* appeared without a topical and tendentious reference to Burke; nearly all the magazines published extensive interpretive essays on his politics and career. Burke mattered to Brougham, Bagehot, Mill, Morley, Macaulay and Beaconsfield, and his name was central in one of several possible guises to an understanding of the evolution of nineteenth-century politics. Arguing about Burke was one way of arguing about the legitimacy and pedigree of both political creeds and political parties. Whig essayists seized on the pro-American Burke of the 1760s and 1770s as their ideological ancestor, dismissing the French revolutionary era which was triumphantly claimed as quintessentially Burkean by Tories and conservatives. What one political group saw as a bar sinister on Burke's liberal eschatology, the other regarded as his true and noblest standard.

Modern scholars of Burke continue to worry away at the same old questions. Admittedly there have been a few astute and successful - in the idiosyncratic way of Burke's essays - attempts to alter the direction of Burke studies. But neither the work of the American neo-conservatives who clutched Burke to their bosom in the 1950s and 1960s, nor of such scholars as John Pocock, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Isaac Kramlick and C. B. Macpherson, has succeeded in diverting the mainstream of scholarship. The questions asked and the answers given - on Burke's philosophical standing, his consistency or incoherence, his political career - have been the same, but they lack the elegant prose and powerful sense of political engagement which made these earlier writings so compelling.

The failure to transcend or to improve upon the literature of our

forefathers has not occurred for want of information on Burke's life and opinions. Between 1958 and 1978 his collected *Correspondence* appeared in ten weighty and well-annotated tomes. And now Paul Langford, aided by several possible ghost-writers, has produced the first complete volume of what promises to be an equally substantial collection of the *Writings and Speeches*.

Dr Langford's text, which includes the famous *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* and all of Burke's speeches on the American question before the summer of 1774, has many strengths. It is as scrupulously edited and its notes are as informative as in the earlier volumes of letters. This is no mean achievement, for Burke's speeches present intractable editorial difficulties. Fragmentary manuscript notes (many of them undated), the accounts of parliamentary diarists and often unreliable newspaper reports have to be sifted and collated. The first editors of Burke's papers went about this task in cavalier fashion: they sacrificed veracity for coherence, cobbling together different accounts of the same speech and conflating separate examples of Burke's oratory. Langford and Todd skillfully set the record straight - sometimes printing several accounts of the same speech, always justifying their choice of text. Burke, who often complained about the mendacious versions of his speeches that circulated in the press, would undoubtedly approve of the editors' pious standards.

The picture of Burke that emerges from this exemplary editing differs from the impression derived from reading the parallel volume of the *Correspondence*. The letters are those of a parliamentary "man of

business". They show Burke organizing parliamentary meetings and petitions, writing party tracts, and tearfully trying to dispel the political apathy and inertia of an indolent Whig aristocracy. This is Burke with his sleeves rolled up: on this evidence he looks very much the practical politician and very rarely the fastidious philosopher.

The Burke of Langford's volume is altogether more precise and scrupulous. The speeches and tracts, for all their richness of image and metaphor, have that prim, sententious quality that so irritated his more matter-of-fact parliamentary colleagues and which led Gillray to depict Burke as a stern and unyielding pedagogue. Here we find Burke's addiction to arguments of principle, his concern with sincerity and consistency. Typical was his constant claim, largely substantiated, as Langford points out, by the evidence of his earliest speeches - that his views were constant and unwavering. And he could never let slip the opportunity, in a debate on clerical subscription, to parade his moral rectitude by rejecting arguments that others believed to favour his cause. Burke's "holier (and brighter) than thou" attitude, which especially rankled those who thought of him as a fish upstairs, confirms Horace Walpole's view that of all the great political figures Burke "had the least political art". The speeches and writings, in other words, contain ample evidence of his moralistic and abstract bent of mind.

Placed back to back with Burke's correspondence, they reveal the essential futility of the old debate about whether he was really a "philosopher" or really a "politician".

This discussion tells us a certain amount about Burke's critics - those who use the term "philosopher" usually approve of it; those who label him "politician" usually don't - but it adds nothing to our knowledge of his conduct and beliefs. He was potently both active politician and abstract thinker, and much of the debate notwithstanding, the one does not necessarily preclude the other.

Langford, in his introduction and the short essays that preface the longer speeches and tracts, does not always succeed in avoiding the pitfalls of the "philosopher" or "politician" debate. Nor does he do justice to the recent literature on Burke's views on party. Though there is the occasional genuflection towards the work of scholars like O'Connor, for most of his discussion Langford is still the quixotic Namierite tilting at delapidated Whig windmills. On the other hand his comments on the American issue are both pithy and more judicious.

This first of twelve projected volumes has set a high standard for its successors. When complete it will mean that Burke's entire oeuvre is available in a modern, scholarly edition. Let us hope that it will also inaugurate a new phase of Burke criticism, one that avoids the hackneyed questions and partial (though engaging) polemics of the nineteenth century for a fuller and less ideologically tendentious account of his erratic yet dazzling career.

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Throwing the switches

By Violet Powell

ADRIAN VAUGHAN:
Signalman's Morning
177pp. John Murray. £8.50.
0 7195 3827 0

Adrian Vaughan has written a specialized but enjoyable book for the sort of railway addict who cannot listen: dry-eyed to the Flanders and Swann song, "Slow Train". Mr Vaughan's own addiction was demonstrated at the age of five when he ran away to the local signal-box. It was from no unhappiness or lack of sympathy that he was escaping. He knew that a signal-box was the place where he ought to be and his aim was accurate. Later he became a habitué of Reading Station, which was in itself an education in engines, the loads they pulled and the ways of railwaymen. Finally, after a spell in the army and some sideline work as a stable lad, Vaughan entered the service of the Great Western to him "England's Greatest Railway", the system that still retains some of the

glamour of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's inspiration.

This book could well be an account of the career of an old railwayman, looking back to the golden days of steam fifty or more years ago, but, in fact, Adrian Vaughan was not born until 1941. His early passion for trains, however, gave him a historical perspective which allowed him to feel part of a great tradition. At Challow, his first station, although it was twelve years since the proud Great Western Railway had been diminished to British Rail (Western Region), the station-master still wore buttons on which an imperial crown surmounted the initials GWR. This was a token that the company had, in their century year of 1935, been called "The Royal Road" by the then Prince of Wales as a tribute to the line's association with Windsor. The same station-master would put on his very smart hat to greet the passengers arriving to catch the 8.58 for Fiddlington, holding to what was later considered to be the fallacy that passengers were the line's bread and butter. It would now seem, from current BR advertising, that the station-master is

considered to have been right. But these, of course, were frivolities compared to the serious business of running a railway.

It was during his period as a "strapper" that Vaughan learnt to appreciate the skill and devotion which seem to have animated most of the staff, who initiated him into the mysteries of setting out, tilting lamps and changing points. (Incidentally, the term "strapper" whose origin seems to have baffled both the young learner and his seniors, must surely be derived from understripper.) It was rare for him to meet a senior who was not anxious to help a beginner. There was one episode of mild ragging and one guard who behaved strangely on account of drunkenness, but otherwise kindness and good manners prevailed. All ranks, as it were, joined in the excitement when the City of Truro, built in 1903, came storming through Challow at 80 mph, pulling the Bristolian, whose headboard dwarfed her smoke-box. A diesel, newly built, had broken down and this historic locomotive, first in the world to reach 100 mph, had come out of semi-retirement to the rescue.

When Vaughan writes of such matters as the intricacies of the now discontinued slip-coach process he is at ease with his technicalities. His dialogue is less easy, perhaps because much of it is used to convey instruction, and spoken words are apt to sound stiff. When finally Vaughan graduated as a signaller he found himself in command of his own sign, and he both deserves and appreciated his responsibilities. The great main-line trains now run through many grass-grown mounds that were once the junctions from which branch lines carried life to the countryside. If, to quote Flinders and Swann, we are no longer assured to stand well clear of the doors "as the slow train leaves the station, it is good to have so much of recent railway legend recorded.

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CHATTO & WINDUS

commentary

Storms in a teapot

By Frances Spalding

Harold Gilman 1878-1919
City Museum and Art Gallery,
Stoke-on-Trent

If Harold Gilman favoured the slice of life, he liked it neatly cut. He is as precise about the stripe in the wallpaper or the contents of a teapot as Arnold Bennett. His lodging-house interiors are as complete as a landlord's inventory. They are also materially and aesthetically substantial: slab-like in their thick paint; crisply designed, one part locking into the next; the colours raised in tone or hue to sharpen compositional tension. A sober hedonism prevails; raw facts are transcended; the familiar is made permanently fresh.

Harold Gilman 1878-1919 remains at the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent until November 14 and will thereafter be toured by the Arts Council to York, Birmingham and the Royal Academy. It is some time since the artist has been the subject of an exhibition in his own right. He is more often seen in the context of the Camden Town Group, who sought to ally their interest in Post-Impressionism with urban subject matter. Gilman felt closest to Ginner, with whom he exhibited in 1913 under the title "Neo-Realist". What they meant by the term can be inferred from Ginner's condemnation of the Naturalist - who copies nature "with a dull and common eye" - having "no personal vision, no individual temperament... no power of research". Naturalism, he concludes, is "the production of a Realist with a poor mind".

At the start Gilman's art reveals an uncommon grasp of reality - both of fact and paint. Affected by the 1890s vogue for Velasquez and the dominating influence of Whistler, he learnt to handle tonal values fluidly and with considerable relish. He may have decided to paint the Whistlerian subject "The Thames at Battersea" in order to demonstrate his differences with this master. Whereas Whistler blurred the clutter of industrial buildings in a dusky wash, Gilman, though his brush hardly pauses on detail, makes them solidly apparent and places an ugly steamer in the centre foreground. Already his love of paint, evident in his free handling of the river, is an important aspect of the picture. His assured technique is comparable with that of Sargent, but never becomes an end in itself, factitious bravura being as foreign to Gilman's character as Whistlerian fantasy.

Had Gilman rested here he would be docketed with Orpen, William Nicholson and others who excelled at but never developed beyond naturalism. Gilman became a friend of Sickert and exhibited with others at his Fitzroy Street studio. When their circle re-formed itself into the Camden Town Group, Gilman insisted on the exclusion of women. He was by then a devoted husband, his wife having returned with their three children to her family in America in 1909. A year later Gilman painted "The Blue Blouse", exchanging his former fluidity for a dry, impacted loading of impasto. It presents a bewitching portrait of Elene Zompoldes, about whom nothing is known, though there is enough likeness between her and the model in the subsequent series of nudes to suggest that she may have played a key role in his art and life.

With this series of nudes Gilman broke through to a new style. It is prefaced by two small paintings exhibited, "The Old Lady" and "Girl by a Mantelpiece", in which touches of colour appear to break loose from the forms they describe. Flesh is now suggested by greens, oranges, purples and vivid pinks. In the nudes, the exhilaration caused by this colouristic richness is matched by the free handling; the bedclothes are de-

scribed with slashing strokes of pure colour, with an expressive vigour that looks forward to Bonnard. Behind this sudden release lay the impact of recent French art which Gilman saw at the 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibition in London and during the course of his subsequent visit to Paris.

The artist he admired most was Van Gogh. He kept an edition of his letters (a selection was translated into English soon after the 1910 exhibition) always in his room. He is known to have judged the success of one of his paintings by holding a Van Gogh postcard reproduction by its side. In his 1913 "Portrait of a Man" the patterned wallpaper pushes forward with a similar insistence to that in the background of Van Gogh's "La Berceuse". But Gilman respected not only the immediacy of Van Gogh's art, but also his humanitarian views. Ginner declared that Gilman preferred to paint "the poorer classes, the natives of Camden Town and their humble interiors". The assertion is difficult to accept, given the middle-class domestic interiors that dominate this show. It does, however, describe "The Eating House", which, despite its vivid greens, yellows and vermilions, is strangely misanthropic in mood, the solitary diners remaining hidden beneath their cloth caps and behind wooden partitions.

As in many of Gilman's paintings, the spectator is made to feel an observer and not part of the scene. A wooden bar runs right across the foreground of "The Eating House" like a fence. Often the subject is glimpsed through a doorway ("The Kitchen") or in a mirror ("The Shopping List"), the figures seen at their tasks, their backs towards us and oblivious of the observer's presence.

Impressionist abstraction

By Tanya Harrod

Gillian Ayres: Paintings
Museum of Modern Art, Oxford

Gillian Ayres was one of the youngest artists in the Redfern Gallery's 1957 exhibition entitled *Metaphysical Abstracts*. It is strange to look through the catalogue of that show, in which a process of confused but urgent assimilation of both European "art informel" and new American painting is revealed in the work of most of the thirty exhibitors. Ayres's painting "Red, Green, Blue, White" stands out among them as being notably straightforward and majestic. Big, decisively drawn areas of solid colour interlock: most look like parts of larger bodies which extend outside the picture area. This way of making a painting act on its surrounding space was surely learnt from two older artists also in the exhibition, Adrian Heath and Roger Hilton, rather than from sources outside Britain.

The Museum of Modern Art at Oxford takes up Ayres's career at a slightly later date, 1959, when she was clearly responding to Abstract Expressionism. In "Cwm Bran", "Cwmni", and "Distillation" it is possible to see important links with her present work. She was already a fine colourist, and innate in these lyrical gestural works is a powerful sense of internal structure. There is a venturesomeness about materials. She painted on unresponsive supports like hardboard and used household paints which dried into a shiny skin alongside passages of thinned oil paint poured stain-like over the surface. The easel was abandoned and so were classical brushmarks.

The other retrospective work in this exhibition is "Islands", painted in 1961. It moves away from the freedom of "Cwm Bran" areas of

Similarly the nurse reading appears to have been caught unposed and is removed from us by her absorption in her book. This circumstantial naturalism aided his realism, as did the kind of detail that helps locate and isolate an individual. Gilman's landlady at Maple Street, Mrs Mounter, appears in several drawings and paintings, hovering watchfully in the doorway between two rooms or glancing with heroic endurance across her domain, the table set with earthenware teapot, milk-jug and plain white cups.

Sadly, none of Gilman's letters survive to detail the circumstances surrounding these paintings. He remains an elusive, slightly melancholic character in the history of English art. The critic Frank Rutter recorded that "rough handled by life, Gilman began to think for himself and take little or nothing on trust. In politics he became a Socialist with a profound distrust of society". The recurrence of the same wallpaper, teapot and sitters in his paintings does suggest the recluse, but on two occasions he travelled to Scandinavia with refreshing results. "The Reapers, Sweden", close to Van Gogh in treatment and subject, is noticeably free of the claustrophobia that sometimes accompanies his more premeditated interiors.

The sixty-two paintings and forty-one drawings selected by Andrew Causey and Richard Thompson - compilers also of the attractive, useful catalogue (96pp, Arts Council Publications, £2.75) - reveal the extent of Gilman's achievement and confirm his position as the leading Camden Town artist after Sickert. They also expose his attitude of mind and this now makes it difficult to accept "The Breakfast Table" as his, despite its stamped signature

added after the artist's death by his second wife. Its dry, fussy technique and rather obvious composition make it more likely the work of William Ratcliffe, Gilman's friend, whom he did much to encourage. Seen in this exhibition it interrupts Gilman's robust conversation like a smirking intrusion.

By the end of the First World War Gilman's paint surface, though still thick, had again become flat and even, and his colours had slightly sunk in tone. His second wife is portrayed seated on a bed, her back towards us, the surrounding fabrics and wallpaper reflecting a suffused light. The elaborate wooden bedstead slices across the foreground and helps frame the scene. The perfect control of every part leaves one wondering how Gilman's work would have developed had he not died in the post-war influenza epidemic. Like Ginner with his increasingly arid pursuit of facts, Gilman might have settled into an unmaking style, late paintings cannot be denied. This austere passionate man had, however, reached a standard that even he might have found difficult to sustain.

Gilman's friend Sickert is the subject of a forthcoming exhibition, *Law Sickert Paintings 1927-42*, at the Hayward Gallery together with the big show devoted to Sir Edwin Lutyens, from November 18. Other current and forthcoming exhibitions include *Goya's Prints* at the British Museum from October 23; *Käthe Kollwitz: Graphic Works* at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, from October 24; *Splendours of the Gonzaga: Renaissance Lords of Mantua* at the V & A from November 3; and *Duncan Grant: Works on Paper* at Anthony d'Offay from November 19.

the violet line to the right, the looped marks to the left and the blue eye of the centre hold the wonderful display of shapes in place. Both paintings are remarkably centralized compositions and this may explain Ayres's success with tondos like the lovely "Ah nine heart".

In slightly earlier works, like "Hirba", lines scarcely exist. We have no sense of marks being put by a brush, but rather (as Timothy Hilton suggests in his introduction to the catalogue) of something being "elicited" from the depth of pigment. But in the tondos, the drawings, the small painting "Mona" and the large "Ariadne on Naxos" a number of shapes recur - empty and full triangles, crosses, lozenges and wave-like series of loops - which have some affinity with Howard Hodgkin's language of forms. "Mona", where they are employed in a relatively impersonal way, seems like a beautiful tribute to Hodgkin, a contemporary of Ayres at Camberwell and her colleague at Corsham. These shapes are also displayed in her oil and charcoal works on paper. All, particularly "Vendevale", are full of beauty. Areas of thinned pigment are drawn over with a strong ragged line. "Ariadne on Naxos" owes much to these drawings. It is the finest and most difficult picture in the exhibition, an immensely complicated work, full of detail. There are areas of small patterning, powerful shapes (some painted quite neutrally, and others lyrically) and dragged lines of colour which seem to float above the surface of the painting. It looks wild and challenging, so that its remarkable coherence comes as a revelation. As in so many of Ayres's paintings all its elements are held together by colour and by a notable painterly touch.

But if in "Flow not so fast ye fountains" and "Bridge of Drepps" the cascading effects, and the titles themselves, are reminiscent of passages of Impressionist paintings, those works are none the less abstract and highly structured. In the first,

Also showing at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, is an exhibition of photographs by Bill Brandt.

commentary

Oratorio profaned

By Peter Conrad

Samson et Dalila
Covent Garden

The last production of *Samson et Dalila* I saw, a year ago in San Francisco, found in the Victorian painter Alma-Tadema a scenic equivalent to the music of Saint-Saëns - sensuality chilled by an academic classicism; the cool marbleizing of flesh. Covent Garden's new production also has a pictorial inspiration, but a very different one. The designer is Sidney Nolan, who locates the work not, like Nicolas Joel and Douglas Schmidt in San Francisco, in a lush tropic zone but in a parched and reddened desert. The Californian production aimed for a realism as minutely researched as the realism as minutely researched as Alma-Tadema's; at Covent Garden the work is jolted from the nineteenth century into the twentieth and interpreted mythically or mystically - Samson is a craggy tribal totem, hewed from the rock of the desert, and Dalila a tigerish archetype, a temptress housed by Nolan in a purple arbour of perverse desires.

The opera, in this presentation, is a contest less between the sexes than between alternative deities. Samson invokes a wrathful God who is conjured out of His invisibility by Nolan's gazes, where His hand,

which feels Samson, glows prophetically, as it radiates; Dalila, on the contrary, serves as the priestess of a greedy idol who demands carnal tribute, who is most properly worshipped - as in the Bacchanal - by orgies, and whose hymns are drinking songs. By stressing this theological rivalry, the director, Elijah Mosinsky, can make sense of the opera's much-criticized reversions to oratorio, for, rather than being a fault, this dissatisfaction with the operatic form is at the centre of the work's meaning. Opera is oratorio profaned, a rite prostituted to make an entertainment. Samson, rebuking the Hebrews or reproaching himself as he labours at the mill, remains a character of oratorio; Dalila, luring him away from his exalted mission, is the evil genius of opera. His voice inveighs, accuses and prophesies, rousing the pusillanimous chorus to action and conducting its rebellion; her voice is operationally employed to allure and seduce.

Even in their love duet, their vocal idioms are contradictory. Dalila insinuates and flatters in the voluptuousness of "Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix", while Samson recapitulates his sacred calling in the rough square phrases of "D'Israël renaît l'espérance!" Vocal union with her, when he is cajoled into singing a refrain to her aria and admitting that he loves her, is his undoing, and his punishment in the next act is to be dragged along to a lewd and frivolous performance of an opera (the revelry in

the temple) where he continues, obeying the dictates of oratorio, to pray. His toppling of the pillars is oratorio's condemnation of its bastardized and truant offspring, opera: Samson demolishes an opera house. No wonder the Paris Opéra, sensing Samson's affront to its palatial luxury, refused the work until fifteen years after its premiere in Weimar.

In Jon Vickers, Covent Garden has a tenor who shares the boldly iconoclastic idealism of Samson. There is a totemic solidity to his presence, the body a granite monolith, the voice as flinty as the mountainous terrain of Nolan's settings. Yet this strength is animated by a sublime frenzy. The voice soars out of him like a prophecy; the body meanwhile rocks back and forth as if reeling up to take off from the de-moaning earth. Dalila comments that though Samson is ferocious in battle, he trembles in her arms. The power of Vickers's singing suggests war rather than love, and when he submits to Dalila he uses, for the yielding repetitions of "Je t'aime", an almost feminine creak, which awfully evinces Samson's "faiblesse". Opposed to the stern and bellicose Vickers, the Dalila of Shirley Verrett, sleek, witty and brazen-voiced, rightly belongs to a different musical world - to opera, for Verrett (with the expert aid of Colin Davis, who lingers over the lazy sensuality of her appeals to Samson in the first act) portrays a temptress nearer to Carmen than to Kundry.

A meeting place of arts

By Katharine Worth

The King of the Great Clock Tower
The Cat and the Moon
Cottesloe Theatre

A curtained stage upon a stage, three figures silhouetted behind the gauze, music of harp and clarinet and the curtains drawn back to the magical opening song of *The Cat and the Moon*, "The cat went here and there/And the moon spun round like a top". At last Yeats has arrived at the National Theatre.

It is a platform performance, which may have something to do with the unusual blend of formality and ease the actors convey. Yeats thought the plays were best done in very simple circumstances, in a study, perhaps, with actors and audience barely separated from each other and all under the same light; then, he said, the impression made by the masked actors would be all the stranger. This production at the Cottesloe Theatre achieves the right degree of artful simplicity.

Harrison Birtwhistle's music follows Yeats's verse with great sensitivity, rising to its own dramatic heights on occasion, as in the thrilling change to a lively dance rhythm when the curtains are drawn on the Dionysiac tableau of King, Queen and severed head, and the Attendants return us to the insouciant world of the ballad-makers: "O, what a life but a mouthful of air! Said the rambling, shambling travelling-man." The visual harmonies are equally right. Jocelyn Herbert's designs capture the subtle mood - between dream and waking - which Yeats believed could be conveyed directly through colour, shape, the texture of a dress, the look of a mask. The masks worn by the actors (the Musicians are in mask-like make-up) are beautiful and compelling: the King's, greyish and intent, the Queen's, oiled, enigmatic, bring all that we are to know of these characters before us. (It is almost painful at the end to see the powerful images reduced to theatrical properties as the actors leave the stage, masks in hand.) The music

and décor are satisfying in themselves, equal elements with the verse and the actors, as in Yeats's imagining: these plays were to be "the meeting place of all the arts".

The Cat and the Moon (first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1931) is the curtain-raiser. This most accessible, human and endearing of Yeats's dance plays is given an interesting push away from the homey, folk-tale quality it often has in performance to a rather more hard-edged and formal effect. Partly this is the result of having the three Musicians in evening dress, looking as if en route for the Royal Festival Hall. Harpist and cellist (who play with great discretion and panache) are at home; but some difficulties have been created for the narrator, Musicians especially in the closing sequence when the lame man recovers the Saint on his back in place of the blind man and is reassured by him that he is "blessed". The briskness of the voice provided for the Saint by the suavely suited Musician strikes a slightly incongruous note, diminishing the gently humorous poignancy of the interchange between Saint and Beggar.

However, this is no more than a shade of reservation. *The Cat and the Moon* is spoken and sung with telling clarity and the "Kyogen" (Yeats's word for it) moves to a satisfyingly droll and poignant climax, when the Blind Man, sight restored, violently upstages company with his other half and the Lame Man finds that the unstable leg can support him in a dance: everything moves into a new phase, like the moon in the song.

The chief play of the brief programme, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, is more exciting. Here the evening-suited Attendants come into their own, strolling on, each with a hand in his outer pocket, debonair showmen, to reveal on the inner stage the tableau of a sophisticated fairy tale: King and Queen on their thrones, he (like a Pinter character) baffled and tormented by her dumbness; she neither speaks nor moves until the Stroller drives the King to her image, drives the King to the order which brings everything to life. The Stroller's head is cut off, the Queen dances, with the head in her



A costume design by Nallia Goncharova for Le Lac des Cygnes - one of over 350 lots in a sale of ballet theatre and music-hall material at Sotheby's on October 29.

hands, the Poet sings through the Attendant - a dream-like, strangely plausible effect. The actors admirably pick up opportunities for relief from the hierarchical fixity of the tale, and even for humour - the ordinary frustration of the King trying to make the dumb Queen respond. "Do something, anything, I care not what", the appearance of the Stroller, coming on with louches, rolling gait, raffish looking in his fox-like mask and red hair.

At the end there are only masks: an uncanny, surrealist tableau: the Queen (interesting played by a man) with the severed head in her arms, the King with drawn sword kneeling at her feet. I left hoping before too long to see all Yeats's theatrically thrilling plays performed at the National Theatre.

This performance will be repeated on November 9 and 10.

Cruising

By Hermione Lee

Way Upstream
Stephen Joseph Theatre
Scarborough

The stage of the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round has been filled with water and in it sits a boat, a cabin cruiser on which the whole action of the play takes place. The audience's delight at this is multiplied when the boat begins to move (it's electronically operated and moves on gantries, a complicated business very smoothly managed), and every effect (running aground, going under bridges) is greeted with deserved enthusiasm. (It seems at first as though Ayckbourn's new play, his twenty-sixth, is going to please the audience in just that sort of comfortable jolly way. Here are the standard Ayckbourn couples setting off on their seven-day cruise, a floating *Bedroom Farce*, up the River Ork: bossy Keith and his dissatisfied, decorative wife June, nice wet Alastair and good-natured Emma. They are contrasted, along familiar lines, as the users and the used, the temperamental and the passive, the fussy and the easy-going. Middle-class marital dissent from the two cabins reads the peaceful night air ("I want someone who respects me as a woman!"), nautical innuendoes run riot and there are hilarious muck-ups (no one knows about boats except Keith, who's read it up in a book so as to be skippier) - a mismanaged docking, a near-fatal encounter with a pleasure-steamer.

But the map in the programme, with its significant names (Wupper Lock, Armageddon Bridge) has already hinted at deeper waters, and we are in them soon enough. The two men are managing partners of a factory which makes novelty goods and which is threatened by a strike. Bossy Keith, the dominant partner, takes a hardline anti-Union stand, while Alastair sits on the fence and news of the revolution arrives every day from Keith's spy, Mrs Hatfield (a splendid comic turn by Susan Uebel). While Keith goes off to re-assess himself as the firm's skipper, Alastair runs the boat aground, and it's rescued by a tough, virile stranger, who takes over Keith's wife and the boat and even the language (his re-naming of the boat and its crew is the play's most cunning joke). He is followed on board by his rich, sexy, decadent girlfriend. The new couple, Vince and Fleur, a self-described adventurer and "victim of the system", and an aristocratic playgirl, get rid of Keith and turn the boat into a "pirate ship" and torture-chamber.

Though the audience wants to go on laughing, there is nothing good-humoured about this part of the play. It's a simple, brutal fantasy about the ease with which fascists, or anarchists, or extremists, can take over and abuse the English middle-classes - based to a large extent on the dislikeable assumption that women are turned on by macho violence. In the end the worms turn, Emma and Alastair acquire heroism from being tyrannised, the pirate flag is replaced by a Union Jack, and a comic idyll is salvaged. Let's not go back, says Emma, they're all so unreasonable. "Then we reasonable ones will just have to go back and reason with them", Alastair replies, sounding like an SDP conference speaker. But since hitting your enemy on the head and running for your life has earlier seemed to be the only effective form of securing a decent civilized society, this final moral flag is hollow ring. Scarborough's company, under Ayckbourn's direction, works hard and well at the transition from comedy to nightmare, but it's a dissatisfying play, which teeters uneasily between its despondent political theme and the kind of jokes Ayckbourn can now (presumably) write in his sleep. The boat is wonderful, though.

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commentary

Elias Canetti: the forms of power

By Idris Parry

Twenty years ago I read Elias Canetti's novel *Auto da Fé*. "Translated from the German under the personal supervision of the author by C. V. Wedgwood". I wanted to know the German title, so I asked some of our most eminent scholars. Nobody knew. Was the German version available? Nobody could tell me. Why was a man with a name like Canetti writing German? This was a mystery to everyone. The title is *Die Blendung*. After more legwork than Philip Marlowe ever got through, I found a copy in the lending library at the International Book Club in the Adelphi. They must have been moved by my pitiful enthusiasm: they took the novel from their shelves and sold it to me.

Since then I've learned that Elias Canetti was born a Bulgarian, writes in German, and that his first language is Spanish. He was born on July 25, 1905 to a family of Sephardic Jews at Russe, a small town on the Danube. Spanish was, of course, still the daily language of these descendants of refugees from Iberian persecution. But Vienna was now the cultural centre. Canetti recalls in his autobiography how his parents conversed in German when they did not want him to understand. This "secret language" fascinated him. In a way, it has remained his own secret language, a particular sphere of expression to be kept pure and isolated against the Spanish background of family and the English of London life after his second removal there, in 1939.

The parents and their three little boys first came to England when

Canetti was six. They joined relatives who were running an import and export business in Manchester. The family's home was in Burton Road, Didsbury, and Elias began the serious pursuit of education at a local dame-school. So his first reading-books were English. He might have become an English writer. But then one morning in 1913 his father collapsed and died at breakfast. The boys were taken back to Vienna by their mother. This was to be the centre of his activities from 1913 until the arrival of Nazis forced him to Paris in 1938. He attended school in Zurich and at Frankfurt am Main. After studies at the University of Vienna he gained a doctorate in chemistry. From Paris he had to move on in 1939 to London, where he still has a flat in Hampstead. His first wife, Vesta, died in 1963. He has also made a home in Zurich with his second wife, Hera, and their daughter, Johanna, his first and only child, born when he was 67. He has been awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Büchner Prize. In 1975, the University of Manchester gave him an honorary D.Litt.

Die Blendung (1935) was his first book, and so far it's the only novel he has published. The idea came to him in 1927, the year when (he is careful to emphasize) the Palace of Justice in Vienna went up in flames, destroyed by the mob. He had already taken a firm resolution to dedicate his life to a study of crowds and their behaviour. "I was as if possessed by this thought; nothing could drive it out of my head. I held

fast to it, with cunning and tenacity, in the face of opposition from all who expected other things of me." After his move to London, Canetti settled to a long factual study of the crowd in history and mythology. In the resulting book, *Mass and Man* (1960), he works his way with many scholarly references through all the recognized crowd symbols - corn, trees, rain, wind, sand, the sea - and concludes that the strongest and oldest symbol for the crowd is fire.

The destructive fires of history and the ritual fires of mythology seem to come together in *Die Blendung*. The main character, Peter Kien, is a sinologist who lives only by his books. "The best definition of home is library." He is haunted by fear of flame, the invading passion. He seals himself in his attic library for defence. Kien is one of four superb figures of fear in this novel. The last is Pfaff, the red-haired porter at Kien's block of flats. Pfaff has the violence of stupidity, the vehemence as well as the colour of flame. His fists bristle with red hairs and are hard enough to drive nails into the cross. Kien has no defence against this vulgar power. He sets fire to himself and his library, he returns to the mass.

In *Mass and Man* Canetti refers to the fire dance of the Navajo Indians as an illustration of the human urge to become fire. In Kien's fate we sense both a timeless human decision into death and a contemporary reference to individuality lost in the forest of flags and figures at Nuremberg, that ordered system of savagery. Canetti has acknowledged a debt to Gogol for free invention and to Stendhal for precision. *Die Blendung* was a sustained rage of invention, a fantasy which seems beyond reality yet is rooted in reality, exact, terrifying, very much like life. By contrast *Mass and Man*, which became available in English as *Crowds and Power* in 1962, is a considerable work of sociology and anthropology. Canetti describes learnedly and at length the mysterious impulses of crowds, the difference in character between mobs, the tensions that rule in social situations. At the centre is pressure on the

individual, the stubborn lonely component. These are the facts which, in the novel, were the basis for a monstrous fairy-tale.

The early 1960s saw the beginnings of public recognition. Technically, the most important event was Canetti's connection with the Munich publishing house of Carl Hanser. This began with their reissue of *Die Blendung* in 1963 and continued with an edition of his plays (*Hochzeit, Komödie der Ehe, Die Befristeten*) in 1964. They continue as his publishers. In the intervening years they have brought out a number of shorter books by him and, more recently, two large and important volumes of autobiography.

Among the shorter books are collections of notes and aphorisms which Canetti started as a daily discipline in 1942. These notes blend into another work, *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch* (1967), one of the strangest and most personal travel books ever written. The English translation, *The Voices of Marrakesh* (1978), includes chapters with headings like "The cries of the blind", "The marabout's saliva" and "The donkey's concupiscence". But perhaps the most important, and certainly the most exciting, of these shorter works is *Der andere Prozess* (1969). It is supposed to be a study of Kafka's letters to Felice Bauer, but this is a pretext for Canetti to talk with knowledge and understanding about his much admired Kafka, whom he calls the only Chinese poet produced by the West: Chinese because of his interest in small things, his projection of his own situation into the humanly insignificant, the insect, the animal, the burrowing mole. How paradoxical it seems when Canetti asserts that Kafka is the greatest expert on power. All those grovelling heroes! Their expertise consists entirely in their ability to give way. In a book of notes, Canetti quotes from another of his admired authors, the Swiss Robert Walser: "I can breathe only in the lower regions." The humility and modesty of Canetti is a philosophical position as well as a personal attribute. It is the perfect place for the observation of power. *Der andere*

Prozess has been translated into English by Christopher Middleton as *Kafka's Other Trial* (1974).

In 1977 Carl Hanser published *Die gerettete Zunge*, the first volume of Canetti's autobiography (published in America as *The Tongue Set Free*). It takes his story up to 1921. The second volume, *Die Fackel im Ohr*, which covers the next decade, came out in 1980. Each is a big book, in the region of 400 pages. It is already clear that we are receiving, in instalments, a classic of German literature. In a way, this work challenges the domination of fiction by making a real life into what appears to be a work of fiction. The events of his life are of great interest in themselves: his childhood in Bulgaria, the years in Manchester, school in Switzerland, the contacts in Vienna in the 1920s with famous figures like Karl Kraus. This life seems like a work of fiction partly because details recalled from the past are so particular and so profuse that the rational mind cannot believe the memory capable of such accurate retention. When a man sets out to talk about history, we expect him to talk about history, his own history. But in German the word for history, "Geschichte", can also mean an invented story, a work of fiction, sometimes called a lie. There is a quiet revolution in Canetti's method of autobiography. He dissolves literary categories. Like Goethe, he is concerned in all his works with fragments of a great confession. The intricate surface of these books about himself is the work of a master who has integrated his past in his present. Where else can it be? He structures his pages with detail in a way that is as unreal as as true in ultimate effect as paint applied stroke by stroke to canvas. Canetti is not merely telling us what he remembers, he is telling us what he knows.

All Canetti's work gives form to observations on power. It is to be hoped that this modest writer will be granted time and energy to continue the wonderful story of his life, right to the moment in Stockholm when he will find it hard to forget he is famous. But that experience too will no doubt be observed, accurately, from the lower regions.

Eschew self-deception, little dove

By Julie Curtis

The Cherry Orchard BBC TV

Chekhov told Stanislavsky that his play was "not a drama, but a comedy, in parts a farce"; the latter retorted that it was a tragedy, and first staged it in 1904 as a lament for a vanishing age. Trevor Griffiths's version, originally seen at the Nottingham Playhouse, attempts to harmonize the ambivalences of *The Cherry Orchard* by emphasizing a quite different aspect: the strength of Trofimov's revolutionary message that happiness and social justice can be attained through work.

Griffiths's alterations and modifications to the text raise more problems than they solve. While Chekhov's Trofimov is an eternal student because he is an ineffectual idealist incapable of practical action, Anton Lesser gives us a sturdy and confident orator (of oddly Hitlerian stamp), persecuted by the authorities. Why then has he spent a whole summer idling with the decaying bourgeoisie? David Rintoul's Yasha presents another transformation,

actually achieving the Parisian elegance to which Chekhov's comic character only aspires. Scorning work, he massages Ranevskaya's shoulders in front of the family, not a part of the duties of a manservant in most Russian families. Why did he ever leave Paris, or bother with the maid-servant (whose pregnancy in this version is as unexpected an addition as the melodramatic death of Firs)?

In Chekhov, Ranevskaya reveals her growing urge to abandon her orchard by her changing attitude to the telegrams from Paris; she is a character of volatile emotions capable of arousing different kinds of love. Judi Dench seems too strong for the role, exuding an erotic power which embraces almost all the males in the cast; and she can't resist even one telegram. The lower classes express themselves in sometimes uncertain Scottish accents; Bill Paterson as Lopakhin, the peasant who makes good and buys the estate, does not avoid a touch of Billy Connolly, although his performance, together with that of Paul Curran as Firs, is one of the brighter aspects of the production. Less convincing is Timothy Spall, offering a slow-motion impersonation of Mike Yarwood as the "dozen disasters" day-man, Epikhodov.

Richard Eyre's production is static, the camera-angles often monotonous. In Act 2 the emphatically unrealistic garden is a bleak landscape of hillocks with sparse grass, from which the passing drunk emerges as though from outer space. Two telegraph poles and an improbable lion on a pole are poor substitutes for cherry trees. The actors stumble over the stilted text, based on a literal translation by Helen Rappaport, calling each other "little dove" and "golden one" with scant conviction. Gayeve returns from town with what sound like "herrings in kirsch" (what the Russian actually means is "from Kerch"). "Black Sea herrings" they appear in Ronald Hingley's accurate and speakable translation, and Trofimov fails to cheer Ranevskaya with his injunction "Be easy now. Eschew self-deception!"

Chekhovian atmosphere and mood - *nastroenie* - are sacrificed almost with any hint of comedy, and the political message seems both crude and confused. It all confirms Berio Wooster's gloomy recollections of Russian plays which last two hours, "the sort of thing where the old home is being sold up and people stand around saying how sad it all is".

To mention just a few of the points raised by Mr O'Connor's review.

Seventeenth-Century Drama

Sir, - Blair Worden, in his review of *Love in It's Ecstasy* (October 2), says that "we all know" that the English Civil War closed the playhouses. It is unfortunate that the myth that the curtain fell on English drama in 1642 because of an Act of Parliament and did not rise again until 1660 when that Act was repealed dies so hard. Leslie Holson's *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (1928) and Alfred Harbage's *Second volume, The Fackel im Ohr*, which covers the next decade, came out in 1980. Each is a big book, in the region of 400 pages. It is already clear that we are receiving, in instalments, a classic of German literature. In a way, this work challenges the domination of fiction by making a real life into what appears to be a work of fiction. The events of his life are of great interest in themselves: his childhood in Bulgaria, the years in Manchester, school in Switzerland, the contacts in Vienna in the 1920s with famous figures like Karl Kraus. This life seems like a work of fiction partly because details recalled from the past are so particular and so profuse that the rational mind cannot believe the memory capable of such accurate retention. When a man sets out to talk about history, we expect him to talk about history, his own history. But in German the word for history, "Geschichte", can also mean an invented story, a work of fiction, sometimes called a lie. There is a quiet revolution in Canetti's method of autobiography. He dissolves literary categories. Like Goethe, he is concerned in all his works with fragments of a great confession. The intricate surface of these books about himself is the work of a master who has integrated his past in his present. Where else can it be? He structures his pages with detail in a way that is as unreal as as true in ultimate effect as paint applied stroke by stroke to canvas. Canetti is not merely telling us what he remembers, he is telling us what he knows.

However, later in his review Blair Worden is in danger of creating a new something "we all know". He supposes that William Wilson, the printer of *Love in It's Ecstasy*, and Gabriel Bedell, Thomas Collins, and Mercy Meighen, the publishers of the work, formed some sort of "group of royalist publicists", and that this group included the printers Richard Royston and Humphrey Moseley. Now, aside from the fact that Richard Royston was the only member of this supposed "group" who regularly got into trouble with the authorities (John Milton was once given authority to seek him out and arrest him), and that Moseley was mainly busy buying up the copyrights to the complete plays of Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and other dramatists (see, for instance, his entries in the *Stationers' Register* for March 4, 1646/7, February 22, 1647/8, April 12, 1652, November 20, 1658, and June 29, 1660), it is important to assert that neither Royston nor Moseley was a printer. In fact, of all the stationers mentioned in the supposed "group", only Wilson had been apprenticed and freed as a printer (see D. F. McKenzie's *Stationers' Company Apprentices 1605-1640*, 1961) and the others never printed a single book in their whole careers. Thus, the "group" must have included several more printers, or, much more likely, did not exist at all.

WILLIAM P. WILLIAMS.
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'Les Dames aux Camélias'

Sir, - It is sad to see the repetition of the usual lurid legends and hoary errors concerning Marie Duplessis in Patrick O'Connor's review of *Madame Isartelle's recent book Les Dames aux Camélias* (October 9). The true facts revealed by the contemporary sources and manuscripts (many completely unknown until now) which I have been working on for a considerable period towards a definitive illustrated documentary study of Marie Duplessis's life and the works inspired by it (and almost none of which appear to have been consulted by Madame Isartelle) are so very much more interesting and valuable. Villenestant's whole account of Marie Duplessis's life, like the recent Mauro biological film starring Isabelle Huppert, is a tissue of errors and inventions from start to finish.

To mention just a few of the points raised by Mr O'Connor's review.

Marie Duplessis's liaison with Perreux lasted for a number of years and was not confined to the end of her life.

Dumas père certainly did not persuade Dumas fils to leave Marie Duplessis and Mr O'Connor's suggestion in this context that she might have had syphilis is completely untrue, as he would have realized if he had taken the trouble to read her doctors' prescriptions which do, in fact, exist.

Mr O'Connor's references to "the small candle-lit rooms of the 1840s" and Marguerite's "modest" apartment are also distinctly bizarre. The flat in question was extremely large (I know it well and have done measured drawings of it), and filled with a mass of possessions so luxurious and costly that the whole of Paris flocked to view it after the occupant's death and the sale of the contents lasted for four days.

ELSPETH A. EVANS.
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Information on Death Certificates

Sir, - I am very puzzled by the last paragraph of Peter Stead's review of Douglas Phillips's *Sir Lewis Morris* (September 18) in which he states "that when Lady Morris died in 1927 she was still a shadowy figure and that when one daughter died in 1956 her death certificate recorded her father's occupation as 'unknown', since death entries or death certificates - I have obtained and examined quite a number during family searches - do not call for or give the parents' names let alone his or her occupation. Birth entries, as you know, give the mother's maiden name as well as the father's name, and marriage entries the father's name and occupation, but I have never met any such useful genealogical information in a death entry."

RAYMOND SMITH.
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'Labyrinths'

Sir, - Unintentionally C. B. Cosgrove has helped my case by showing (Letters, October 9) that the Penguin version of Borges is no more than a literal transcript of the Spanish text. This is a practice that Borges himself has explicitly decried (*Borges on Writing*, 1974). He has also, in the same book, said that his revision takes the form of changing what in first draft "sounds unnatural". Nothing is likely to sound more unnatural to an English ear than (for instance) Mr Irby's rendering of "las infinitas aldeas" as "the infinite villages". The primary meaning of "infinites" as "exceeding measurement" is here suppressed and the archaic meaning, "innumerable", asserted; and there is no machinery in the immediate context of the Irby version to allow for this to be done successfully. That is why I prefer Mr di Giovanni's translation, "the numberless villages". It is as though Mr Irby were to render "Sur le plus haut des monts s'arrentent les chevaux" as "On the highest of the mountains the horses arrest themselves", or "nec venit inanis rusticus saluator" as "nor does the greatest saviour come inane". This is not how the good translator functions. I am sure that Messrs Irby and Yates will be delighted to have Mr Cosgrove's blessing upon their endeavours. But it is a pity Mr Cosgrove does not seem to know that the translations of Norman Thomas di Giovanni come out under the imprimatur of Borges.

PHILIP HOBSBAUM.
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Marie Duplessis was never a prostitute, she was a courtesan.

Misprints in Books

Sir, - Recently, both in the national press and in your own columns, reviewers have complained of misprints in books and have blamed the author or editor for "careless proof-reading". Reviews of the latest DNB volume are a case in point. Whereas blaming the author may be justified in some cases, I think that a wider issue is involved here, namely the alarming deterioration in standards of British book production, once the envy of the world.

Any author who has seen one of his books through the press in the past five years will know what I mean. It is obvious from our daily papers that standards of type-setting have been allowed to fall, and this is spreading to books, where much more time is available for the avoidance of errors. I will not enrol you in an argument with the NGA over where responsibility lies, but it seems to me that the recent technological "advances" in type-setting have a lot to answer for. Computerized setting (and comparable systems) may be quicker and may make storage easier and cheaper, but its proneness to error is disastrous. Whether this is caused by an inherent fault in the system, poor operating, lack of staff to do the correcting, or lack of training in the new methods, I cannot say (though I can guess).

It is rare these days for an author to receive proofs both at galley stage and at page stage. If he is so fortunate, he will find, as I have recently done, that many of the errors marked at galley stage have still not been corrected at page stage and a few more have probably crept in. One is assured "they will be done", but one still, for safety, marks them

all again, wasting time and effort. If one receives only page-proofs, these are often full of misprints and there is no method whereby an author can ensure that his corrections are done nor does he get a chance to check on the new errors which nowadays inevitably accompany correcting. Once upon a time, one could rely at this final stage on a printer's reader to ensure as near to 100 per cent accuracy as one could wish. Now, sadly, this seems to be impossible.

When one considers the price the public is being asked to pay for books, it is surely time that publishers got together to try to return to the standards of a decade ago.

MICHAEL KENNEDY.
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Nuclear War

Sir, - Martin Hlyth, taking one step along the discussion of nuclear-free zones (which began with J. R. Vincent's review of a book on Tony Benn's thoughts), gets as far as "since that time [ie, 1945] the countries which have run the greatest risk of nuclear attack have been those which possess nuclear weapons" (Letters, September 25). But the next step adduces the evidence that only those which have not had nuclear weapons, and none of those which have had nuclear weapons, have been subjected to conventional or nuclear attack.

From there it seems to follow that for any individual country the possession of nuclear weapons is advantageous. Which however is absurd, as in a world of nuclear weapons states, nuclear war is more likely in some undetermined proportion to how many there are. And from that it seems to follow that the only thing

worth going for is general and comprehensive disarmament, so that then both motives and means of attack (nuclear and conventional), and also risks of accident, should be reduced.

This is a state of affairs unlikely ever to be completely achieved, but that it is still the only one worth aiming at, both logic and experience suggest.

ELIZABETH YOUNG.
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'Georgiana'

Sir, - Another misleading item in Brian Masters's *Georgiana*, to add to that mentioned by Arthur Calder-Marshall (Letters, October 9), is the claim that he has finally removed all room for doubt concerning the legitimacy of her son, the sixth Duke of Devonshire. As Mr Calder-Marshall points out in *The Two Duchesses*, the canon was authoritatively and categorically refuted as long ago as 1818.

PIERS BRENDON.
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'Goethe on Art'

Sir, - In his review of John Gage's *Goethe on Art* (October 2), Idris Parry wonders whether Mr Gage provides the first English translation of an excerpt from Johannes Falk's *Goethe aus netheren persönlichen Umgang dargestellt*. In fact the complete work was translated by Sarah Austin and appeared in her *Characteristics of Goethe* (London, 1833).

D. J. T. BALL.
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Among this week's contributors

JULIAN BARNES's novel *Metroland* was published last year.

JILLIAN BECKER is the author of *Hitler's Children: the Rise and Fall of the Baader-Meinhof Terror Gang*, 1980.

R. N. BERK is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics, University of Hull.

J. S. BRATTON is the author of *Wilton's Music Hall*, 1980.

JOHN BREWER is Professor of History and Literature at Harvard University, and the author of *Party Ideology*, *Popular Politics*, 1976.

PETER CLARKE is the author of *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 1978.

PETER CONRAD's books include *Romantic Opera and Literary Form*, 1977, and *Imagining America*, 1980.

GEORGE CRAIG is Reader in French at the University of Sussex.

PATRICIA CRAIG's critical study, *The Lady Investigator: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*, a collaboration with Mary Cadogan, was published earlier this year.

MARCUS CUNLIFFE's books include *Charlet Slavery and Wage Slavery*, 1979.

ROBERT DONINGTON's *The Rise of Opera* will be published shortly.

RICHARD ELLMANN's recent books include *Ulysses on the Liffey*, 1972, and *The Consciousness of Joyce*, 1977.

D. J. ENRIGHT's recent collections of poems include *A Faust Book*, 1978.

APRIL FRIZLYON is writing a biography of the singer Maria Malibran.

PAUL FUSSELL's most recent book is *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars*, 1981.

MARTHA GELLIHORN's most recent novel is *The Weather in Africa*, 1979.

RICHARD GRENIER is film critic of *Commentary*.

TANYA HARROD has recently completed a study of the Arundel Society.

PETER HOLLAND's *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* was published in 1979.

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF is the author of *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution*, 1978.

JOHN KERRIGAN is editing Shakespeare's sonnets for Penguin and *The Merchant of Venice* for Oxford University Press.

A. WALTON LITZ's books include *The Art of James Joyce*, 1961, and *Jane Austen: A Study of her Artistic Development*, 1965.

WILFRID MELLERS's books include *Bach and the Dance of God*, 1981.

JANET MORGAN is the editor of *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, published earlier this year.

RICHARD MURPHY's *Selected Poems* were published last year.

DAVID NOKES is a lecturer in English at King's College, London.

PATRICK O'CONNOR is the editor and publisher of *A Tribute to Yvonne Princeps*, 1978.

IDRIS PARRY was Professor of German at Manchester University from 1963 to 1978.

NICHOLAS PHILLIPSON is co-editor, with Rosalind Mitchison, of *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, 1970.

DILYS POWELL's books include *The Villa Ariadne*, 1973.

VIOLET POWELL's most recent book is *Flora Anne Steele: Novelist of India*, 1981.

CAROL RUMENS's most recent collection of poems is *Unplayed Music*, 1981.

T. A. SHIPPEY is Professor of English Language at the University of Leeds.

PAUL SMITH is Professor of Modern History at the University of Southampton.

FRANCES SPALDING's biography of Roger Fry was published last year.

STUART SUTHERLAND is Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Sussex.

ANTHONY THWAITE's most recent collection of poems is *Victorian Voices*, 1980.

T. O. TREADWELL is a lecturer in English at the Roehampton Institute of Higher Education.

FRANK TUOHY's collection of stories *Live Bait* was published in 1978.

KETH WALKER is a lecturer in English at University College London.

KATHARINE WORTH's books include *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett*, 1978.

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Commentary continues on page 1247.

Misery and mystery

By George Craig

JULIAN GLOAG:
Lost and Found
206pp. Secker and Warburg. £5.95.
0 436 1204 1

The central preoccupation in this novel is with loss; the organizing principle, the memories of a loser. The deliberately jumbled chronology still allows us to learn within twenty pages that Paul Molphey, policeman, schoolmaster in a Burgundian village, having lost his (presumably killed by German captors), father (death on active service), wife (desertion), twin daughters (respectively disaffected and entry into a chaste religious order); as well as the result of his one major venture into writing, the manuscript novel *Signals of a New World*. The human losses are briefly, unemphatically described; the imaginative ones, merely mentioned. The disappearance of the manuscript, its importance and its relation to the other disappearances are continually hinted at, but the circumstantial story is made clear only much later, and then only to hint that it is not the whole story.

Hints, remembering, partial disclosures, unannounced leaps in time; in any novel, however light the novelist's touch, the play of these must set up enigmas, unresolved questions. But touch is everything in such a case. It is one thing to discover that we must wait and watch for the unfolding, quite another to have the fact repeatedly and uncompromisingly thrust at us; and that is Julian Gloag's way in *Lost and Found*. Two early examples will serve. At one

point we find his central character musing on his misfortunes. "He mustn't forget Fley, the parish priest, his long enemy for years. At Fley's sudden, stupid death he'd wept... tears not spent for mother, father, wife or children... not even... for the greatest loss of all, the missing *Signals of a New World*". It will be another 150 pages before we can begin to understand this or know how, and how much, it matters. A little later, another retrospect ("When, after their three agonizing weeks in Paris - 'our honeymoon' - they had returned to Ste Colombe...") allows, almost encourages, every kind of guessing, but Gloag again defers for many pages the resolving of the puzzle these words create.

In a novel so firmly centred on the chronicling of its hero's failures and defeats, such mystery-mongering is more than just so many local irritations. Taken together with the sheer number of his misfortunes, they throw inordinate weight forward on the eventual explanation, and outwards on to the presentation of the central figure. For different reasons, neither can bear the strain. Not only are the puzzles too many and too protean, but the author, as if bored by his own design, pushes beyond clarification of the past and, with the "twist in the tail" that reviewers are honour bound not to "give away", brings into the relative hopelessness of the present a belated element of suspense.

The problem posed by the hero is more complicated; it touches, indeed, on everything in the novel. There is, first, the question of Frenchness. It may be structurally convenient that he should be a schoolmaster (everyone will know

him, he will know everyone). The trouble is that a primary school-teacher in rural France - unlike his English equivalent - can't be simply a temperamental. He is also and always a functionary, operating in a highly varying network of necessary implication: social, administrative, ideological even. Gloag is far too knowledgeable to make any of the cruder mistakes about France and the French, but his handling is uncertain and wayward. It is in fact essentially English. We are, in short, up against a familiar paradox: an author who knows his France takes gratuitous risks in order to show how well he knows it and ends up by revealing that he doesn't know it quite well enough. Nowhere is this clearer than in dialogue and reported speech, where "Frenchness" is obtrusively present, as actual French or as stylized "translation", and not quite right ("Elles sont des anges", said by a village woman of the baby twins).

And it would need absolute certainty of social and cultural placing to offset the extreme precariousness of the hero's hold on the world. What are we to make of a nun who, without aspiration to or capacity for sainthood, humbly accepts a sequence of misfortunes which Zola would hardly have dared to inflict on his "degenerates"? The telling one, admittedly far less frenetic, Gloag's writing is deliberate, almost ceremonious: human doings are understated, and only the things of nature are given richness of detail or sensuous charge. But there are too many instances of disaster for even that implied contrast to supply a satisfactory direction to the novel. Nor do the samples of Molphey's own writing (remembered passages of the lost manuscript) offer any serious suggestion of an alternative order. What do we learn from its opening words: "Today in my village the bells rang out for peace over a dreamless people. But dreams there are..."

The reticence and the elegiac tone of Gloag's novel cannot wholly keep away the suspicion that it is in the end the misfortunes that matter: that we are reading about something nasty in the woodshed.

Failing relations

By Patricia Craig

VALERIE KERSHAW:
The Bank Manager's Wife
160pp. Duckworth. £7.95.
0 7156 1600 5

Naughtiness carried to the point of malignancy is one of Valerie Kershaw's themes; another is the way in which destructive urges can co-exist with apparent innocuousness and amiability. In her last novel, *Rosa*, the true delinquent was a cheery schoolgirl sent to help out with housework at the home of her mother's friend; in *The Bank Manager's Wife* it's the sixty-three-year-old Dorie Smith whose way of life is threatened by her husband's retirement plans. What Dorie fears is usurpation: if George, who has shown a sudden disturbing interest in shopping and cooking arrangements, takes over her chores and alters her routines, what will be left to fill her days? Faced with a possible loss of identity, it is all Dorie can do not to lose her head.

Valerie Kershaw goes for cosiness of tone rather than eccentricity of manner or narrative aplomb, dwelling on the tedium and safety of the Smiths' domestic habits before beginning to chart the little disturbances that precede the major - climactic - one. She makes no attempt to subvert the reader's idea of ordinariness by transforming the commonplace into the quirky, as certain other Duckworth authors do; instead, she gets her effects by contrasting the sinister element in her plot with the everyday environment which nurtures it. Actually, Dorie is no more satisfactory a culprit than Rosa was; she's simply not peculiar or ill-intentioned enough, in spite of the author's efforts to suggest an unsteadiness, and a suppressed taste for devilment in her. There is something a little too easy and artless, as well, in the way her more robust thoughts are always accompanied by an exclamation mark: "If George could change his routine so could she!" True, Dorie does have an overt

idiosyncrasy, an enthusiasm for deformed cacti ("Weird-o plants," her neighbour calls them) which she cultivates in a greenhouse put up with money from her grandmother's War Bonds. These odd-looking estates eventually find their way into a witch's brew which is dishd up to poor unsuspecting George.

George's passion for order (he "lived by the plumbline"; anything a fraction out of true horrified him) gets a full measure of rather facile humorous treatment; in fact, he's an endearing old boy who bundles his wife up in cardigans and raincoats and woolly socks and takes her walking in bad weather for the good of her health. She, in her turn, acting the part required of her, seems as demure and docile as any naturally submissive wife, trotting out to the car at eight o'clock on a rainy morning to place newspaper on the spot where George will put his feet. Most of the conventions by which people live - especially in the rather prissy suburbs of medium-sized towns - can be made to seem absurd, as Dorie's and George's do; but the slightly ridiculous, observed with affection, doesn't help to procure the chilling undercurrent this kind of domestic fantasy requires.

Like *Rosa*, *The Bank Manager's Wife* contains some elementary symbolism which is reasonably effective; Dorie and her cristates (both incapable of reproduction) represent sterility; the principles of neatness and conservatism are embodied in George; and vulgar, cheerful Maureen from next door, always ready with a truism ("Men!... They're all the same, aren't they?") or an act of kindness, stands for uncomplicated fecundity. She stands, too, for a kind of back-street camaraderie, note and warmth which Dorie remembers with faint nostalgia from her own childhood: the contrast here is between the fruitful turbulence of the past and the deadly respectability of the present. The qualities are too tidily opposed, though, and this is a central failing of the novel. Valerie Kershaw has attempted a small-scale black comedy of failing relations, but she is not quite deviant or ruthless enough to bring it off.

LANGUAGE

JOHN SIMON:
Paradigms Lost
Reflections on Literacy and Its Decline
222pp. Chatto and Windus. £9.95.
0 7011 2601 9

In a *visu voce* examination for a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Oxford by an American student, one of the examiners remarked: "On page 209 you state that General Chiang Kai-shek wanted to move more troops to Peking, but General MacArthur wasn't having any. Wasn't having any what, Mr Jones? Like the typist left a word out?" Like General MacArthur John Simon isn't having any, but his onslaught on illiteracy is not marked by the tact of an Oxford examiner. Indeed among the many epithets Simon uses in castigating stylistic and grammatical errors and infelicities are *dreadful*, *monstrous*, *ghastly*, and *godawful*. His linguistic purism is such that there can be little doubt that he uses the word "dreadful" not as a colloquial intensifier but because the abuse of language genuinely inspires him with dread; one cannot help feeling, however, that had he encountered the word *godawful* in another author he would have delivered a severe rebuke.

Simon, on his own account, loved language from an early age and had mastered Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian and German before he went to school. He wrote his first poem at the age of six, which in a rare moment of modesty he admits was "most likely inferior to the early *canzoni* and sonnets of Dante". He learnt English at the age of twelve and subsequently became one of the leading theatre and film critics in the United States. For the past few years he has felt it his duty to maintain the purity of his adopted language and to this end has written a series of scorching pieces for *Mare* and other American journals. It is these articles that are reprinted in *Paradigms Lost*. One of the more curious features of writers is that they will often listen respectfully to criticisms of their ideas, plots, and attempts at characterization, but are outraged by the least hint of criticism of their prose. Simon is not given to hinting, and his pugnacious attempts to defend the American language by noting abuses in its better-known authors have aroused the fury of Gore Vidal, Patrick Owens and many others. It is bad enough to have one's prose corrected by a native speaker, but to suffer at the hands of a Yugoslav must be particularly galling. Simon himself avers that his "coming to English relatively late" was "a distinct advantage" since it enabled him to compare the language with those he had previously mastered and made him aware of American English as "the interpreter of a society". One cannot help suspecting that any advantage gained comes from a different direction. A skill learnt with difficulty is likely to be cherished, and for Simon the Anglo-American language is precious; so, in a different sense, is his use of it.

Despite his intemperance, he is usually right and what he has to say needs saying, even if much of it has been said before. Scattered through his pages are about twenty examples of what he aptly calls sibling rivalry - pairs of words and phrases which are readily confused, like *disinterested-uninterested*, *forego-forgo*, *among-amid*, and *mual-shared*. In fact, with two exceptions, all these pairs are dealt with by Fowler, whose capacity to net solecisms has made it hard for his successors to display originality. The two exceptions are *rained-reined* (which Fowler may have thought beneath his notice) and *fulsome-full*, though with this pair, as with *infer-infer*, Simon fails to note that the useful distinction in meaning has arisen comparatively recently.

Simon records many other verbal blunders which appear in eminent American authors and even in his rival lexicographers. He is sound on

The grammarian's last stand

By Stuart Sutherland

the subjunctive, catching Irving Howe writing "As if to take a New York subway comes, as indeed it does, to taking on the weight of the world". In examining *What's Happening to American English?* by A. and C. Tibbels, he is able to establish that at least part of what is happening to it is their own doing. In writing of "requirements as to type and quality" they make the sloppy "as to" substitute for "of"; even more reprehensible is their phrase "good schools are much like each other", there still being, Simon hopes, more than two good schools. He even catches them producing the ungainly pleonasm "filled full".

Simon is particularly good at exposing the mistakes of the mighty. The first sentence of Arthur Miller's *In the Country* reads "Born and raised in city apartments, it was always a marvel to me". Miller is so attached to the unattached participle that on the following page he writes: "Later that afternoon, eating a sandwich in the sun, the first itching

no reference to the sex of the person referred to is intended. On the use of the word 'Man' to mean the species *homo sapiens*, Simon for once yields too easily. He suggests the clumsy "human beings", which is almost as bad as calling dogs "canine animals".

Perhaps of more long-term significance is the defilement of language by the influence of Marxists, anarchists and other egalitarians. Professor Wayne O'Neill of Harvard and MIT believes that teaching standard English is a capitalist plot. He declares that "its main purpose was indeed part of the main purpose of popular education, i.e. to render school children skilled enough to be exploited but finally uneducated, to oppose their education...". The last clause is presumably intended to mean "too alienated to oppose their education", and it is said that this professor should want to impose his own illiteracy on others. One of the less desirable effects of respecting

Simon fails to mention a further destructive influence at work in the United States, namely the growth of "psychobabble", as expounded in a book of that title by Arthur Rosen and by Cyra McFadden in her novel *The Serial*. The language stems from the fringe psychotherapies of the West Coast, which encourage their devotees to "do their own thing" and "let it all hang out". The comforting notion that whatever you really want to do or say is good provided you really want to do or say it must be contributing to the idea that there is no such thing as illiteracy. Moreover, psychobabble is itself an impediment to precise thought. The word "upright" can mean *sad, depressed, unhappy, angry, conventional, frustrated, jealous, bitter, uneasy, disloyal, anxious, fearful, withdrawn, sarcastic, bullying, authoritarian, timid, shy* or merely *conspicuous*.

To the important question of why it is worth attempting to preserve literacy, Simon gives an answer that is not complete. He argues that

once begin with words or phrases like "Ah, you reply...". "So you see...". "Look...". "No sir...". "Fair enough...". And "Well...". His repeated use of the last word becomes extremely tiresome. On the lecture platform it gives the speaker a chance to think, but an essayist who has not done his thinking in advance insults his readers. Although Simon reproves others for the use of clichés, he too often has recourse to them himself. A few of the more objectionable: "beat the living daylight out of", "play fast and loose", "food for thought", "makes my blood freeze", "nipped in the bud", "go down the drain", "stop in its tracks", "rock bottom", "going great guns", and "like a lead balloon". That he is not without some sense of shame is evidenced by his occasional attempt to reanimate a cliché by giving it a small twist. But to be successful this trick needs more wit than is supplied by the inversion "separating the good from the sheep" or by "a kettle of fishiness".

He sets out with candour his own approach to English: "I suppose I must credit my coming to English relatively late with my especially analytical, exploratory, adventurous approach to it". Adventurous though it may be, this is a shoddy sentence. The repeated "ell" sounds produce an awkward assonance; moreover, one can only "credit" a person or thing "with" something possessed by that person or thing and the "analytical, exploratory, adventurous approach" belongs to Simon not to his coming to English relatively late. Learning English late may have sensitized him to some aspects of the language, but the nuances often escape him.

Let us, as Simon so often does with others, open his book at random, which means choosing an illustrative page with care. On page 212 he writes: "This is where day-care centers could...". Why use the vague colloquialism "come in" instead of the more precise "be helpful"? A little later he writes, "The difficulty of course is what to do about the discrepancy the little ones would notice between the speech of the day-care people and their parents". "The little ones" is either a coy or a facetious periphrasis for children; in either case, it is objectionable. Moreover, there is something odd about four-year-old children *noting* a discrepancy. Since dogs and four-year-old children cannot write, they cannot even metaphorically "note" things though they may well "notice" them. On the previous page Simon talks of academic standards being "heightened", instead of using the more idiomatic word "raised". His desire to escape the obvious word is too obtrusive. It ill becomes someone who accuses others of using the ponderous expression "moving pictures" for "movies" to write "a poet as well as a fiction writer...". The word "novelist" is both terser and produces a better balanced phrase. By starting paragraphs with "And..." and "But..." ending sentences with the word "however", and having many sentences without verbs, he may be trying to show that stylistic rules can be broken by good writers, but there are subtler ways of demonstrating a mastery of the English language. Much of Simon's effortlessness merely distracts the reader and seems out of place in an essayist. We should, however, perhaps be asking a subtler question: why should he strive to preserve certain words, like - in aleatory order, as he would say - *raffian, toutous, caducity, elucubrated, incassate, hypallage, and obnubilation*, but too often he descends into facetiousness as in his repeated use of "for the nonce", or resorts to slang.

Given the care that Simon has devoted to thinking about the American language, it is puzzling that he should self-consciously have chosen to adopt a style so full of contradictory elements. He is at his best when being most vindictive and he produces some fine bursts of invective. In the world of literature there is room for the occasional rogue elephant as well as the gadfly.

The hard lives

By Richard Brown

SEAMUS DE FAOITE:
The More we are Together
140pp. Poolbeg. £2.
0 905169 36 0

MAIRTIN O CADHAIN:
The Road to Brighticity
111pp. Poolbeg. £1.92.
0 905169 47 6

JOHN MCARDLE:
It's Handy When People Don't Die
158pp. Poolbeg. £2.20.
0 905 169 43 3

VAL MULKERN:
An Idle Woman
144pp. Poolbeg. £2.
0 905169 34 4

Three of these four collections owe a considerable debt to the encouragement given to new Anglo-Irish short stories in the *Irish Press* and in recent anthologies like *New Irish Writing* and *Best Irish Short Stories*. The fourth is a translation from the Gaelic of nine stories by Mairtin O Cadhain, who was a teacher and campaigner against the erosion of the Irish culture of the West until his death in 1970.

Taken together they offer some support to the idea that the Irish short story has a characteristic rural setting where the threatened cultural and economic traditions of the folk are central to a feeling of national identity. In Seamus de Faolte's *The More we are Together*, for example, the old ways die hard. In "The Old Stock" an older generation of townspeople attempt to settle two unfairly disinherited local boys on some common land; theirs by family tradition if not in law, but the newer generation of working-class "intruders" resists. In his title story two more brothers, their traditional cooper's trade on the decline, slowly decay in themselves. They are philosophical people with humble aspirations: "A few times more to power a young girl well made under the glass of her white

pelit. A few times more to tell the stranger to his face that he's no good."

Those who resist the lure of emigration to America scratch a hard living in Mairtin O Cadhain's stories. They may, as in "Floodtide", be up before dawn, thigh-deep in the spring tide collecting seaweed for fertilizer, or else they may, like the woman in "The Road to Brighticity", have to walk to market by moonlight to sell a little pat of butter and a few eggs - so few that "she knew the eggs of each and every hen". In John McArdle's "A Growth of Some Kind" life is equally hard - a farmer fights to stem the tide of breeding rabbits rather than go to hospital with his cancer.

Val Mulhern's collection, *An Idle Woman*, differs from all these in that her settings are more urban, her characters decidedly housewife and domestic. Interesting incidents occur when people enter the close domestic circle - when some gypsy children are invited to a birthday party, for example, or at family Christmases, or when a young Frenchman visits to learn the language. Otherwise things may perk up on holiday, as in "Away From It All". Life is never as interesting for the rather silly female protagonist of "Open House" as it is for the convivial couple whose house she determines to buy. But when the moves, all the enchanting guests and friendly atmosphere are gone, if there is a characteristic Irishness in Val Mulhern it is her interest in adultery as a theme, a thoughtful, reticent interest and one posed partly though not entirely in relation to "Humane Vitae" and birth control. This interest is present in McArdle too, in his very successful story "The Warmth and the Wine", in which a faithful husband feels guilty for not committing adultery on a trip away from home.

Most of the stories have their moments of lyric and metaphoric vitality, but restraint is the main virtue of Val Mulhern's writing; and there is an impressive studied formality to O Cadhain's collection. The stories are strongest on details of situation and atmosphere; they are often realistically sparkling in plotting and incident; and characters move towards generally, rather than sharp individuality.

Refusing to join

By T. O. Treadwell

MICHAEL CURTIN:
The Replay
271pp. André Deutsch. £6.95.
0 233 97327 3

The eccentricities of his fellow men are the comic novelist's stock-in-trade, and if the comic novelist is Irish, the consequent embarrassment of riches must present serious problems; the Paddy is a common stereotype, and often set in Ireland can, and often does, reduce itself to the perpetuation of the cliché. A standard solution to this difficulty is to contrast the familiar warm-hearted, drunken irresponsibility with the calculating meanness of the world outside, and this is the tactic adopted in *The Replay*. It doesn't always work, but there are many Irish jokes along the way, and very good some of them are.

Set in the town of "Mellick" (based on Limerick?), the novel's central character is Stanley Callaghan, a thirty-eight year-old primary school teacher with a desirable house in the smartest area and an improbably beautiful and sexy American wife. Into this idyll, like an outlaw in a western, bursts the crass and foul-mouthed Henry Corr, an emigrant from Mellick who has made good in the United States (in computers, significantly), and has now returned to his native heath with a mission.

Henry Corr has a grudge. Fifteen years earlier, his posh football side had been beaten by a motley collection of layabouts representing a local pub of which Stanley Callaghan had been the guiding spirit. Corr reckons

his side was cheated and, aflame for revenge, he challenges Stanley to a replay, the teams to be unaltered and the stakes to be eleven thousand pounds.

This situation having been set up in the first chapter, the novel, like the classic western film, settles down to anticipate the shoot-out. We are introduced to a leisurely manner to the members of Stanley's boyhood gang, now reassembling to form his football side. Most of these spend their days quietly in disinterested devotion to porter, but the group also includes such specimens as a millionaire TV star, a henpecked pop singer, and a fortuitously-sane resident in the local lunatic asylum. The chapters devoted to these exotics contain some good touches - the TV star's hit private-eye series is about to be cancelled, for example, because the hero doesn't smoke and the head of a giant American network senses the imminence of a pro-nicotine backlash, while the pseudolunatic is periodically smuggled out of his asylum by the male nurses who are then free to visit all the pubs in town in search of him. But these chapters are related only tenuously to the ostensible themes of the novel, so that the jokes work at the expense of a looseness of structure.

The novel's themes centre around the character of Stanley himself. He leads a lonely battle to uphold the standards of his boyhood, with the result that his pupils learn their multiplication tables by rote and practice penmanship with straight pens, the bridges of their noses precisely nine inches from their copybooks. Thereplay becomes the focus for this struggle against contemporary society. Stanley refuses to allow his men to train, insisting, indeed, that their alcohol and tobacco intake be increased in the

name of amateurism: "You see", Stanley continued as the whiskey and porter was served, "this is more than a soccer match. This is a battle against chewing gum, unisex hair shops, transfer markets, yobboes, dirty chants, midfielders and the fact that you can't charge the goalkeeper any more". Stanley's integrity ought to be the novel's main issue, but it's never clear whether this is to be seen as quickly admirable or as part of the joke. The uncertainty becomes mildly irritating because it gets in the way of the book's real centre of interest, which is the climactic match itself.

By the time this arrives, we've fully back in the old Irish play tradition, with key parts being played by the lunatic and an IRA robbery squad, and a man-of-the-match honour going to a recently exhumed corpse. As in all good westerns, the old standards wave, triumphant if a bit tattered, over the refusal of Stanley (and therefore Mellick, and therefore Ireland) to join the modern world.

In Christopher Wood's *Tahwan* (252pp. Michael Joseph. £6.95. 0 7181 2051 5), an alcoholic journalist, an out of work American businessman and a former British Army officer plan to steal a selection of priceless exhibits from Taiwan's National Palace Museum and sell them to yet another of these mythical millionaires who have a secret collection of stolen masterpieces. A vastly over-worked idea, but redeemed in execution here by breathless action to a constant accompaniment of small arms fire, oceans of gore, a typhoon, and enough unpleasant characters to fill a Chamber of Horrors several times over.

T. J. Binyon



The tone of the Nineties

By A. Walton Litz

PHILLIP I. MARCUS, WARWICK GOULD, MICHAEL J. SIDNELL, EDITORS

The Secret Rose, Stories by W. B. Yeats
A Variorum Edition
271pp. Cornell University Press.
\$28.50.
0 8014 1194 7

We seldom think of William Butler Yeats as a novelist and prolific writer of short stories. Yet from 1887, when his father urged him to write a story "partly of London, partly of Sligo", until 1902-03, when he abandoned his autobiographical novel *The Speckled Bird*, Yeats devoted a great deal of his artistic energy to prose fiction. Two of the eight volumes in the 1908 *Collected Works* are made up entirely of stories and tales, which range from the veiled spiritualism of "Rosa Alchemica" to the attempted realism of *John Sherman*. After the turn of the century Yeats still retained some interest in his early fictions: the Red Hanrahan stories were recast in 1903-04 with the help of Lady Gregory, and many of the stories of the 1890s were revised for *Early Poems and Stories* (1925). Even as late as 1931-32, when Yeats was preparing the abridged *Collected Works* of his works (renamed the *Collected Edition* after his death), he took great care with the texts of his early stories. But these later revisions were merely to remake himself by remaking his works, and do not represent a continuing interest in prose fiction. After 1902-03 the energy that produced the stories was diverted into the more open forms of the diaries and *Autobiographies* into the "simple forms" of poetry "that like a masquer's mask protect us with their anonymity".

The New Critics produced a version of Yeats's career in which everything before "Adam's Curse" is mere pre-

lude to the "major" phases, and for those brought up in this tradition the prose of the *Autobiographies* or *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* will seem the most important and compelling. Yet the early fiction is crucial if we are to understand Yeats's works of the 1890s, which are not only "major" in their own way but the essential foundation of his later achievements. *The Secret Rose, Stories* by W. B. Yeats: A Variorum Edition collects the most important of the early fictions, with a scrupulous record of their long and complicated textual histories. *John Sherman* and *Dhova* and *The Speckled Bird*, recently published in separate scholarly editions, are omitted, as are the tales of *The Celtic Twilight*. The heart of this Variorum Edition is the stories published by Yeats in 1897 as *The Secret Rose, The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi*. The editors have retained the *Secret Rose* as the collective title partly because most of the stories appeared in that volume, and partly (one suspects) because it is of all Yeats's titles the one that best evokes the mood of his work in the late 1890s. Following the divisions that Yeats made for *Mythologies*, the editors have grouped the stories under three headings: "The Secret Rose", "Stories of Red Hanrahan", and "Rosa Alchemica, The Tables of the Law, and The Adoration of the Magi". They have recorded all variants from first publications up to and including the 1931-32 *Mythologies* proofs that Yeats corrected with the assistance of Thomas Mark, the editor at Macmillan whom he called "the best reader for the press I have ever come across". Unfortunately, the economic slump of the 1930s prevented the publication of a *Collected Edition* during Yeats's lifetime, and when the text of *Mythologies* was finally prepared for publication in the 1950s Thomas Mark did not have access to the corrected proofs of 1931-32, which had been sent to Mrs Yeats in 1939 and never returned. Thus there are a number of minor variants between the familiar 1959 text of *Mythologies* and the 1931-32 version, and

these are recorded by the editors in an appendix.

Since the differences between the versions of the Red Hanrahan stories published in the 1890s and the revised version of 1903 are too radical to be presented intelligibly in the form of variant readings, the editors wisely decided to collate only the 1905 and later versions against the 1931-32 *Mythologies* text. The 1897 versions of the Red Hanrahan stories are printed in a separate section, along with variants from the earlier periodical publications. This section of "Other Texts" also includes two stories that were abandoned after 1897, "The Binding of the Hair" and "The Rose of Shadow".

The editing of the Variorum Edition is thorough and sensible. The volume is not announced as an official part of the Cornell Yeats, a planned scholarly edition of all Yeats's poems, plays, and prose, but it is difficult to imagine the work being done again. The apparatus of *The Secret Rose* is complete and relatively easy to use. Veteran users of the various editions of the poetry and plays know that a complete record of a Yeatsian text is rarely easy to read, with the variants often threatening to take over the page, but the editors of *The Secret Rose* have done the best job possible, leaving the basic text clear for the reader and recording the variants as key notes. The decision to use the corrected 1931-32 *Mythologies* proofs as the basic text is logical, since this was the last version to pass Yeats's scrutiny, but the editors wisely do not speak of a "final" or "best" text. They know that every version of every story represents "Yeats's intention of the moment", and that the most important editorial responsibility is to give a full sense of the relationships among all the texts. With Yeats, as with Joyce and many other modern writers, conventional bibliographical notions about "final intentions" and the "best text" must give way to the concept of recording an evolving text, with each stage in the evolution fully and easily recoverable. Like his poems and plays, Yeats's stories cannot be fully appreciated without some insight into the process of revision.

Having said this, it must also be said that the revisions of the stories are seldom as interesting or revealing as the revisions of the poems and prose never produced that "click of the box" we discover in the revisions of so

many of his poems, when after many half-successful attempts there is a sudden quantum jump into final form. There is nothing in the evolution of the stories quite like the changes in "Maid Quiet", which make its development a model of Yeats's poetic progress from 1892 to 1908, or like the radical rewriting of "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" for the 1925 *Early Poems and Stories*, which turned a pleasant by-product of *The Celtic Twilight* into a quintessential "Tower" poem related to Yeats's 1926-27 series "A Man Young and Old". In spite of many changes in phrasing and references to Byzantium and winding stairs, most of the late revisions do not affect the basic tones or themes of the early stories. In "The Phases of the Moon" Michael Roberts, thinking of "Rosa Alchemica", tells Owen Aherne that Yeats "wrote of me in that extravagant style/He had learnt from Pater", and the editors of *The Secret Rose* stress Yeats's efforts in his revisions to subdue Paterian extravagance. But the cumulative effect of such changes is not profound, and the Paterian tone remains. The stylistic adjustments made after the turn of the century may be abundant, but they do not give us that feeling of deep self-transformation which led Yeats to compare the rewriting of his poetry with Pound's recreation of "Properius or some Chinese poet".

The most interesting exception to this generalization is the recasting of the Red Hanrahan stories between *The Secret Rose* (1897) and *Stories of Red Hanrahan* (1905). As Richard Finnerman has shown in his monograph on the prose fiction, these major revisions not only resulted in greater realism of character and speech but gave the tales a unified structure and an esoteric framework. Unlike most of the other stories in *The Secret Rose*, the Red Hanrahan cycle justifies the motto Yeats affixed to the 1908 *Collected Works* as a caution to those who deplored the changes made in familiar poems: "It is myself that I remake."

One of the chief virtues of the Variorum Edition is that it reminds us of the central place of the stories in the artistic life of the young Yeats. And of the immense labour he devoted to them. The poetry of *The Rose* and *The Wind among the Reeds* takes on greater strength and completeness when read in the context of these stories and the early critical essays which resemble

them, such as "The Autumn of the Body". Shortly after *The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi* were printed privately in 1897 (they had been originally intended for *The Secret Rose*, but the publisher asked Yeats to omit them), the young James Joyce bought a copy of a book stall on the Dublin quays, and had soon learned long passages by heart. It is easy to understand Joyce's obsession with these stories, in which the meretricious rhythms of *The Wind among the Reeds* are incorporated into prose fiction. The more esoteric stories in *The Secret Rose* have a special and haunting voice, the voice of Pater in his most lyrical passages modified by the Symbolism of the Nineties. It is a voice which speaks for a brief but intense moment in English literary history, one that was both an end and a beginning. And it was to become the inner voice of the young Stephen Dedalus, a voice never quite invalidated by Joyce's retrospective irony.

Joyce's subtle handling of the "Nineties" tone of voice in *Portrait of the Artist* stands in sharp contrast to Yeats's rather simple narrative methods, and reminds us that Yeats never fully understood or respected the technical innovations of modern prose fiction. It would be unfair to judge the stories of *The Secret Rose* by the standards of James or Conrad, but it is not unfair to suggest that Yeats abandoned prose fiction because the genre in its full range was not suited to his talent or temperament. The stories of *The Secret Rose* are products of a time when prose and poetry seemed about to converge. Yeats left a memorial to this time in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, where the first entry is Pater's famous description of the Mona Lisa set up as if it were a free verse poem of the Nineties. This blurring of the distinction between prose and poetry was congenial to Yeats, since all his characters are finally transparent versions of himself; but it severely limited the range of his prose fiction. Although he was a master of the simple narrative or folk tale, Yeats had little interest in those complex ways of telling that distance a writer from his work. He could not write the modern stories "about real people" demanded by his father, and he ultimately decided that what remained could be better expressed in poetry or drama. The stories of *The Secret Rose*, for all their intrinsic and historical interest, leave us content with this decision.

One of the chief virtues of the Variorum Edition is that it reminds us of the central place of the stories in the artistic life of the young Yeats. And of the immense labour he devoted to them. The poetry of *The Rose* and *The Wind among the Reeds* takes on greater strength and completeness when read in the context of these stories and the early critical essays which resemble

closely argued essay, whose influence should extend beyond the small world of professional Swiftians.

Woolley's other essay supports a suggestion, made elsewhere in this collection, by Aubrey L. Williams, that the *Panegyric* on the Reverend Dr Swift may not be by Swift at all. Swift took a constant delight in portraying himself as he thought others saw him, or as he wanted them to think he thought they saw him. But what makes a man abuse himself in such crude laudatorial terms as these? — as someone who

Of swallowed down a stronger potion
Bob's spittle mixed with Harry's mud.

Those, including myself, who believe in the infinite variety of Swift's irony, may recall the similarity here with the sole prescription for the maladies of their own dung and urine, forcibly put down the yahoo's throat. May not Swift be acknowledging his own kinship with these beasts? Or perhaps he simply shared the common but usually unconfessed belief that all publicity is good publicity? Woolley, who belongs to the non-ironic school, offers a cogent and plausible argument that James Arbuckle was in fact the author of the *Panegyric*. He adduces the evidence of handwriting, provenance, and some contemporary ascriptions. I suspect, reluctantly, that his arguments may be correct, though they remove a great deal of interest from the poem.

From the facts to the feelings

By Marcus Cunliffe

JOSEPH F. BYRNES:
The Virgin of Chartres
An Intellectual and Psychological History of the Work of Henry Adams
194pp. East Brunswick, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. \$17.50.
0 8386 2369 7

CHARLES K. HOFFING:
Custer and the Little Big Horn
A Psychobiographical Inquiry
118pp. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. \$15.95.
0 8143 1668 9

The protagonists of these books have little in common beyond being American and contemporary (Adams was born in 1838, Custer a year later). The New Englander Henry Adams, grandson and great-grandson of American presidents, was a small, shy, snobbish gentleman of letters. During the Civil War he lived in London, where his father was United States minister to Great Britain. George Armstrong Custer, precociously a veteran of that conflict, was the son of an Ohio blacksmith. A "Come-on-boys!" cavalryman, he rose to the command of a brigade at the age of twenty-three and ended the war as a temporary major-general. Custer's Last Stand, at which he and his companies of the Seventh Cavalry were wiped out by Indians in southern Montana, took place in 1876. Adams lived until 1918. His printed correspondence makes no mention of Custer; and Custer had no reason to be aware of Adams. True, Henry's wife, Marian Adams, bore almost the same name as Colonel Custer's cook, Mary Adams; but we may be fairly sure they were not related.

The connection of course is that both these books attempt a "psychobiographical" approach and use some of the same sources. The late Charles Hoffing was a psychiatrist; Joseph Byrnes is a student of medieval religion and art who has familiarized himself with the literature of psychological history.

What is the current standing of this type of inquiry? Its practitioners, who are I think more numerous in the United States than anywhere else, claim quite a wide following and some significant successes. Writing on "Psychobiography" in *The Past Before Us*, (ed Michael Kammen, 1980), Peter Loewenberg argues that it "combines historical analysis with social science models, humanistic sensibility, and psychodynamic theory and clinical insights to create a fuller, more rounded view of the past". Like other advocates of psychobiography, Loewenberg regards history and psychoanalysis as parallel or even analogous disciplines. Both, that is, are said to be concerned with human behaviour in the dimension of time; with origins and development; with dispassionate assessments of normality and abnormality. Loewenberg is able to quote Freud's vision of an ideal psychoanalytic training that would include "cultural history, mythology, the psychology of religion, and literary criticism". He can also, from the opposite direction, invoke the great shade of the historian Marc Bloch ("Historical facts are, in essence, psychological facts"). He can draw attention to a number of articles in scholarly journals, and indeed to the mature establishment of the *Journal of Psychohistory*, known in a junior phase as *The History of Childhood Quarterly*. The *Journal of Psychohistory*, Loewenberg tells us, has emerged as a field of postgraduate study at Yale, Princeton, MIT, as well as at his own institution, UCLA, and other comparable places.

And the products? The prize exhibit in Professor Loewenberg's list is Erik Erikson, the author of *Childhood and Society* (1950) and *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (1958). In Luther he dealt with a figure of manifest external importance, and of an inner vehemence which has fas-

inated (or repelled) every investigator, whether Arthur Hugh Clough or G. V. Plekhanov. Moreover, Erikson's neo-Freudianism treated infancy as merely one of several stages of growth. In Luther's case, the "identity crisis" of late adolescence is well enough documented not to require recourse to advanced psychoanalytic speculation. Also in the late 1950s, American historians were publishing biographical studies (eg, of Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House, by Alexander and Juliette George, and of the intelligent yet ineffectual British general Sir Henry Clinton, by William B. Willcox) which seemed to confirm the promise held out by Eriksonian "ego psychology". David M. Potter's *People of Plenty* (1954) fitted child-rearing practices into an interpretation of American economic character. The diplomatic historian William L. Langer, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association (1967), prescribed the application of psychoanalysis as the "next assignment" for members of his profession. A great day was apparently dawning.

Whether it ever dawned or may still dawn is a moot point. On the positive side, history over the past thirty years has revealed an increasingly eclectic response to familial, irrational or unconscious factors — fantasies, symbolisms, tribalisms.



The young Henry Adams

atavisms, paranoias, ranging from medieval witchcraft to the death camps of the twentieth century. Following Freud's speculations on Leonardo da Vinci, analytic notions have been applied to art and literature in the American field, for example, by Marie Bonaparte or Edgar Allan Poe and by Frederick Crews on Nathaniel Hawthorne. Public figures have also been investigated: eg, James and J. S. Mill by Bruce Mazlish, Andrew Jackson by Michael P. Rogin's *Fathers and Children*. Erikson turned his attention to Gandhi. The interaction of private and public emotions has been weighed in the cases of Bismarck, Hitler, Richard Nixon. Nor have historians confined themselves to individuals. Thus, there has been work on Nazi youth; and Loewenberg alludes to a book by George Fergie (1979) in which "the antebellum generation, typified by Abraham Lincoln, is treated in psychoanalytic terms... as a cohort that forged its identity against the legacy of a powerful generation of Founding Fathers — heroes all... men who could never be equaled without a crisis and struggle that was even greater than theirs". *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978), by Christopher Lasch, tries to relate parental and sibling relations to work-attitudes, and thence to the larger structures of American capitalism.

Against all this, there is the summary dismissal by Vladimir Nabokov of "the Vienna charlatan": the admission by psychohistorians that orthodox Freudianism (for instance, the Oedipus complex) is in part outmoded; the embarrassing slapdash and cranky interpretation of Woodrow Wilson, published posthumously by Freud in conjunction with William C. Bullitt; the declining reputa-

tion of Erikson; the apostasy of former Freudians like Frederick Crews and David E. Stannard, as evidenced in the latter's *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (1980); and the recent lack of enthusiasm shown by respected historians — one of whom, Lawrence Stone, has referred to psychohistory as "a disaster area". Equally sharp criticism has come from Jacques Barzun and Geoffrey Barraclough.

Quite apart from an objective consideration of its merits, there are several possible explanations for the failure of psychohistory to win anything like full acceptance, or even to find its ground. One is that conventional historians remain unduly suspicious, and ignorantly so. They can be accused of denouncing a branch of scholarship they have never taken the trouble to understand, and whose evolution is therefore a mystery to them. Another suggestion is that historians, in common with other academics who face a new development, are afraid both of being taken in and of being left out; so they tend to endorse a fresh theory, but in cautiously general terms which can subsequently be rescinded. This may have happened for many historians so far as psychology is concerned: they once gave it an equivocal welcome, or temporary lease, that has now expired. Some may feel that testimonies were extorted from them by zealous advocates, like those sectarian missionaries who ring the doorbell at inconvenient moments and will not take "don't know" or "don't care" for a conge. Or it can be argued that psychohistory has so successfully permeated the historical profession that its value and novelty no longer have an impact — except in a few untypical or outrageous cases, such as Freud's book on Wilson, which reawaken crude prejudices.

There are, however, more important considerations. Even the most indefatigable scholar must set limits upon research. He or she perforce chooses whatever appears the most promising area and technique of investigation. Psychohistory is only one approach among several. It is of limited utility for prosopography, or collective biography, of which Lawrence Stone has been a distinguished exponent. Outside the United States, it has not commanded itself to the majority of radically inclined social and economic historians (eg, E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm), or to the quantifying "cliometricians". The active and gloriously influential French Annalists, represented by Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, have gone off on a very different tack stressing broad conditions (climate, diet, demography) with scant regard for individual psyches or for the narrative biography of *histoire événementielle*. In this perspective, psychohistory begins to appear as an idea whose time has come — and gone. Psychology does seem to have been absorbed, where it may be of service, but as one among a number of approaches; not as the master technique. Ironically, Sigmund Freud himself now begins to figure as a historical exhibit, rather than as the scholar's *deus ex machina*. An elegantly cool example is the chapter "Politics and Patriarchy in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams", in Carl E. Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (1980), which discusses the excessive subjectivity of Freud's reading of the Oedipus legend. Freud, says Schorske, forgets that Oedipus is a king, with public duties to perform.

There are other difficulties that have not yet been altogether resolved. Erikson is supposed to have remarked that "We're not a term of psychoanalysis"; I take this to mean that the central psychoanalytic technique addressed a single, uniquely constituted person. In this respect the discipline is humanistic rather than scientific; nevertheless it is rigorous in establishing and testing evidence. It is also ambitious, in seeking the essential bases of personality, the most profound interpreta-

tion of the individual psyche. Such an inquiry must be systematic, and comprehensive. The investigator must conscientiously review every factor before reaching any conclusion.

An obvious problem: how can the analyst amass sufficient evidence relating to a past individual whom he never encountered? This does not seem an insuperable difficulty, at least not where, as often enough, there is a quantity of evidence. More complicated is the relationship of the analyst to a supposed group or cohort, and to other externalities. Can a technique devised for individuals operate for pluralities? The labour of testing one person is substantial; to psychoanalyse a dozen or more is a formidable task. If one relies upon broader psychological concepts (the theory, say, that first-born children reveal particular patterns of personality; or that parental roles vary according to social, race and ethnic divisions), these tend to operate on a different level from that appropriate to individual analysis. The level may then cease to pertain to professional psychoanalytic training and exegesis. It may conceivably come from some other scholarly domain such as anthropology. If so, psychohistory may appear to the outsider to be either rigorous yet arcaneously voluminous, or else so

Nor therefore does he speculate as to whether Elizabeth Cameron's daughter Martha, a great favourite with Henry, could have been Henry's child. Other Adams scholars, most recently Dr Dusiñberre, have pretty conclusively argued that Henry's attachment to Elizabeth remained platonic. They too hypothesize that she and her daughter were nevertheless precious to Adams. He wrote often to them, with wit and affection. It was to Elizabeth that he sent his "Prayer to the Virgin" poem, though in characteristic self-disparagement.

An early semi-Freudian theory, propounded by Oscar Cargill, was that Henry's satirical tone in *Esther*, and a suggestion of suicide in the novel, acted upon his wife's unstable temperament and prompted her own suicide. Out of guilt, Henry sought to atone. Marian was childless; the Mariority (or Mariandarity) of *Mont-Saint-Michel* in effect canonized his dead wife. Byrnes goes beyond this rather crude formulation. He is careful to establish the external circumstances of Adams, a well-placed *rentier* with strong though perversely concealed yearnings for excellence and recognition. On the psychological plane, he suggests that the fascination for Henry of the Virgin of Chartres must also involve an oblique tribute to the unattainable Madonna-with-Child, Elizabeth Cameron. He relies upon the theories of Sigmund Freud, and various refinements of these, particularly those which distinguish between "defense mechanisms" and more robust "coping" mechanisms — Adams combining both in his efforts to overcome his grief, self-accusation, loneliness, and estrangement from the *fin-de-siècle* world of Europe and America.

The Virgin of Chartres is a temperate exercise in intellectual-cum-psychological history. Some of the psychoanalytic concepts (for example, "projection") strike me as enlighteningly relevant. But the author's likeable lack of Sigmundian arrogance diminishes the force of his theme. Henry's sympathy for women was of long standing. Were they in some ways surrogates for himself, especially in the novels: cultivated, fastidious, yet peripheral, and ultimately without power in Gilded Age America? That may have been one feminine role-model. There are also signs that he delighted, however vicariously, in the sexual and maternal power of women, as he saw them in Samon, and as he dreamed of them in reading of the cult of Isis. Was this Earth-Goddess, certainly present in his composite vision of the Virgin of Chartres, compatible with his somewhat asexual Hooper-

A final comment. Though responsible psychohistory is not to blame, it has never quite shaken off the debunking reductionism associated with some brands of biography ever since Freudian vocabulary began to be popularized in the early 1920s. Fawn Brdée's new biography of President Nixon turns out to be an unloving scrutiny of this kind, with clues to his later skulduggery planted around in the dismal undergrowth of his Whittier childhood. Byrnes and Hoffing have, by con-



Col. George Custer

generalized that it lapses into large statements available to everybody — and, at both extremes, not only unverifiable but ill-at-ease with social circumstance.

In this latter context, we may wonder whether George Fergie's hypothesis on the pre-Civil-War generation implies that male Americans contemporary with Abraham Lincoln *invented*, or at any rate exacerbated, the crisis over sectionalism and slavery, in order to vie with their founding forefathers. The assertion would of course not be provable. But it would be disquieting on other grounds, in seeming to depart from common sense by denying the historical origins of slavery and sectionalism, which predate the American Revolution. To a lesser extent, comparable circular problems trouble the reader of Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch is a historian of unusual energy and sensibility. He tries to go deep. But certain psychohistorical concepts are so far below the surface that their "true" existence can only be inferred. Their utility in consequence approaches that of metaphor. In the end, immense labour may show results not evidently more reliable than those derived from imaginative guesswork.

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Less than playful

By David Nokes

JOHN IRWIN FISCHER and DONALD C. MELL (Editors):
Contemporary Studies of Swift's Poetry
215pp. Associated University Presses.
\$18.50.
0 87413 173 1

Most of these essays originated as contributions to special sessions of the Modern Language Association devoted to Swift's poetry between 1976 and 1978. This is no doubt why all of them are short (there are sixteen in 180 pages) and many are inconclusive. They are notes and queries, hints and hints exchanged among paid-up members of the Swiftian fraternity.

Surprisingly few of the essays have new points to make; approaches run a familiar gamut from source-seeking to psychoanalysis. Donna O. Fricke finds striking similarities between Swift and Skelton, who share "a unique English thrust — the priest's bold attack on corruption in the church and state alike". The suggestion, which does not originate with her, is left floating, another of the random sightings which analogy-spotters accumulate with the same enthusiasm that Laputan astronomers show in counting comets. Thomas B. Glomax, representing "the psychoanalytical school of Swiftians", offers some unexceptionable observations on narcissism in *Stirphon*

and *Chloe*, though his real intention is to discredit the polymorphously perverse implications in Norman O. Brown's notorious study of Swift's faeces. A. H. Scouten reminds us of George Sherburn's lament, delivered forty years ago, that "no book on Swift has ever done justice to the infinite playfulness of his mind", but the present volume is hardly remarkable for playfulness. David M. Vieth employs the terms "metaphors and metamorphoses" to give coherence and consistency to the poems written between 1698 and 1714. However, when he admits of *Baucis and Philemon* that "metamorphosis changes nothing essential", and of the *Elegy* on Partridge that "this particular metamorphosis changes nothing" one may question the usefulness of seeking to apply such restrictive definitions in the first place.

The best essays in the volume are both by James Woolley. His piece on *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* opens an old argument in a deliberately provocative manner. With casuistry worthy of Swift himself he seeks to prove that the eulogist at the Rose Tavern speaks with the straight, not a forked tongue. "The eulogy as a whole is far closer to a serious representation of Swift than is sometimes supposed." However, even Woolley can find "no entirely satisfactory way to explain the remark that Swift lashed the Vice but spared the Name". It is a remark which occurs, one should remember, in the course of a poem which itself mentions some twenty names, and lashes a good dozen of them. It's a

Cameron model? How did Marian fit in with Elizabeth and with Martha (a grown woman by the time Henry finished *Mont-Saint-Michel*)?

Dr Byrnes is content to confine analysis to Adams's psychic needs after his mid-life crisis. The theorizing is plausible. Arguably, however, Adams's identification with the France of 1815-1820 had other aspects, left out of the reckoning by Byrnes. Thus, a whole chapter of *Mont-Saint-Michel* is devoted to Peter Abelard, whose wife-lover Héloïse also comes into the story. It is reasonable to hypothesize (as in Robert M. Lane, *Henry Adams on the Road to Charnes*, 1971, but not in Byrnes) that Abelard was a surrogate for Adams: Abelard, like Adams, a brilliant intellectual, irritating to his peers, fundamentally rationalistic, but humanized by his connection with the ultimate woman, Héloïse; castrated by her vengeful uncle; finally silenced by the authorities, though in a relatively privileged way. As far as it goes, this is not a bad study. On the whole, the psychologizing is helpful. I am not sure, though, that it is indispensable. And of course it does not offer guidance in estimating the scholarly or literary merit of *Mont-Saint-Michel* – as distinct from Henry Adams's salience in writing about the Virgin.

The drama of Custer involves different issues. He dashed off some magazine pieces (not analysed by Dr Holling) but can hardly be called an author. Nor did his family leave abundant records of his early life. He married up in the social scale. Having got an appointment to the US Military Academy, he was in any event upwardly mobile. The Civil War gave him his big chance. Custer remained in the peacetime army, with a depressing drop in status, and the companionship of officers who had also taken a cut. Indian fighting was intermittently exciting but conferred far less glory than the battles of 1861-65.

Holling's basic notion is that Custer's final campaign was marked by alterations of hesitation and rashness; and that these resulted from tensions over his seniority in the military scheme of things. Custer, we are told, was a loyal subordinate to father-figures who outranked him and were appreciably older. He was himself a successful father-figure to soldiers clearly younger and junior in rank. But he was inconsistent and awkward in his dealings with men of about his own age placed in command over him, and disliked by officers of equal or greater age and experience whom he happened to outrank. Holling's hypothesis is not quite as simple as that (we learn, for

example, that Custer was childless), but he does not go a great deal further. The rather terse chapters on Custer's life and campaigns are fairly convincing (though the maps in the book are atrocious).

As with Byrnes on Henry Adams, however, I do not believe that the analytic approach is essential to the account, even though more than a mere condiment. Custer, and his fellow officers in post-war America ("immured," said Alfred de Vigny of the French officers in the post-Napoleonic army, "in the belly of a wooden horse that would never open in any Troy"), were bored and isolated, with interludes of terror and brutality. Custer's frustration was heightened by his failure to secure appointments elsewhere – for instance, back at West Point. He was good at some types of soldiering, bad at others. Courts-martial were a frequent occurrence in the American peacetime army. Custer exceeded the average, usually for disobedience of orders.

Perhaps his case most aptly illustrates the value of cohort psychology. Custer needs to be placed among his brother-cavalrymen (with all the sibling-rivalry implications of that word "brother") – next to Marcus A. Reno and Frederick Benteen who, Dr Holling notes in a haunting climactic paragraph, sat still on their horses when they heard the firing from Custer's party, and refrained from riding to the sound of the guns. "Of course we should have gone", one of their number repined long afterwards. The year 1876 was, he remembered, America's centennial, a year of public celebrations and political scandals in which it was not easy to tell the sheriff's men from the rustlers.

Intriguingly (material for cultural anthropology even more than for psychohistory?), Americans were swift to invent legends to discount Custer's defeat. Several versions circulated as to the identity of Sitting Bull, the Sioux Warrior who had triumphed at the Little Big Horn. In one pseudo-biography he was an Indian educated by French-speaking Canadians, brought up a devout Roman Catholic with a bias against white American Protestants. In another, he was actually a West Point cadet, named "Bison" McLean, who had been dismissed on the eve of graduation, for despoiling a virgin named Effie Conklin, of Buttermilk Falls. So naturally he vowed vengeance against Custer the Academy graduate, fair-haired and blue-eyed – who could only be brought low by a sophisticated brother-warrior from the Point.

as an American (rather than solely a Southerner (an illuminating retraction by Louis Rubin), Allen Tate's *The Fathers* as historical romance and Walker Percy the satirist of visionary networks are offered to us under the implicit rubric that Romanticism has enjoyed a dialectical relation with American history. John Seelye's "The Clay Foot of the Climber: Richard M. Nixon in Context" proposes, wittily that Nixon embodies the dark shadow to be found in Franklin's *Autobiography* as in Horatio Alger, a man lusting not for success or power, like earlier demons, but for "that Canaan of the middle class, *reivrenem*, not only in California or Florida, but in both those best possible worlds – for a secularized Protestant heaven.

This book is unusually enjoyable. The contributors write with an almost uniform lightness and intelligence which few such compilations can rival, and from their diverse perspectives they give American literature a welcome grounding in the history of the dream on which the nation was founded and on which it still runs: Ronald Reagan's insistence that America shall be "the shining city on the hill" belongs to a tradition both lived and literary, part of the *tabula rasa* of American identity. Britain may explain the way we both live and write.

William L. Andrews (Editor): *Literary Romanticism in America* 136pp. Louisiana State University Press. £10.45. 0 8071 0760 3.

"Change and experiment elsewhere have come so thick and fast that we are now the oldest among the governments of the chief nations of the earth. The word experiment thus seems outmoded, even though we all trust that we shall never cease to experiment." To a British reader, no longer a citizen of one of the chief nations of the earth, Clarence Gohdes's recognition that America is no longer young is salutary. It sets the tone not only for his proposal that Emerson should become his nation's primo intellectual export but for this whole collection. Romanticism in America has recently seemed to divide into either the familiar tradition of estate naming; from Whitman to Chuck Berry; or Harold Bloom's visionary Ellison. What William Andrews's contributors propose collectively is a Romanticism enmeshed in politics: Emerson, Hawthorne, the good citizen, black writings of the 1850s, Thomas Wolfe,

Thinking the absolute

By R. N. Berki

GILLIAN ROSE:

Hegel Contra Sociology 248pp. Athlone Press. £18 (paperback, £6.95) 0 485 11214 0

The most intriguing question this remarkable book raises concerns Hegel's "absolute". Gillian Rose's central argument is that "Hegel's philosophy has no social import if the absolute is banished or suppressed, if the absolute cannot be thought." It is, crudely to paraphrase Dr Rose's sophisticated thesis, the recovery, amounting to a retrieval of Hegelianism's "speculative experience", which can today serve as a fundamental critique of sociological thought, both non-Marxist and Marxist, the latter constructed on what the author terms the "neo-Kantian paradigm". Only Hegel, it appears, by means of his radical critique of Kant and Fichte, could break out of the strait-jacket presented by the original version of this paradigm, but his thought came to be "mystified" by posterity.

The neo-Kantian paradigm, in Dr Rose's argument, signifies above all the dominance of sociological theory by "methodologism" and "moralism", by which she alludes to the unquestioning acceptance by theorists of mental constructs as external criteria or preconditions setting narrow limits to rational enquiry into the nature of society. These preconditions are ultimately derivable from Kant's *Dignität*, assume in non-Marxist Western sociology the form either of "objective validity" as in Durkheim and theories of "values", or of subjective "values" and supra-rational "ends" of individual actors, as in Weber and theories of "action". Neither of these two main tendencies, however, since they manifestly fall short of thinking the "absolute", can in principle comprehend the sociological significance of human "transformative activity". More surprisingly, perhaps, Dr Rose then turns also on Marxist sociology from which she charges, likewise remains rooted in neo-Kantianism and its abstract "dichotomies", notwithstanding the renovatory but unsuccessful attempts even of "Hegelian" (mistakenly so called, Dr Rose asserts) Marxists like Lukács, Adorno and Habermas. Marx himself suffers telling criticism for his defective, "Fichtean" reading of Hegel and for remaining oblivious of the force of the Hegelian absolute. A truly Hegelian Marxism, Dr Rose intimates, would have had greater success as an "absolute" cultural critique, combining revolution with reformation. She thinks that Marx's comments on "commodity fetishism" approximate closest to Hegelian "speculative" thought, and her conclusion envisages a "critical Marxism" based on her recovery of an un-mystified Hegel.

What, then, is the "absolute" which alone bestows "social import" on Hegel's philosophy? Dr Rose points primarily to two things, hitherto frequently underestimated or misconstrued by students of Hegel. The first, and in my opinion

more important, is the meaning of Hegel's "speculative proposition" expressing "speculative experience". Properly, this means the simultaneous assertion and awareness of both "identity" and discrepancy or difference; the absolute, as the philosophical formulation of this complex, totalizing but at the same time fragmented consciousness, thus refers to the sundered "whole", the union of the finite and the infinite, that which is veritably "present" in experience yet enjoins to the full "achievement" of it. The "real" and the "rational", for Hegel, as Dr Rose suggests, are speculatively conjoined, and not in a relation of simple identity that would imply social conservatism; that "the task of philosophy is to describe what is, because what is is reason" is not to be construed in terms of a quietist acceptance and justification of what "is", but, on the contrary, in terms of its speculative meaning, which expresses a total, "negative" and transcendent criticism. Dr Rose argues that for Hegel the fundamental speculative experience was the "identity of state and religion", where this "identity" of course refers not to their actually experienced non-identity, their discrepancy. This negative experience appears to have provided the motive force for Hegel's indictment of the modern bourgeois epoch, and his exposure of its "illusions" of unity realized on the level of subjective consciousness which surface in the form of determinate and divisive social structures.

Dr Rose's second strategy for retrieving Hegel's meaning (and the line of argument here is not exactly novel), consists in highlighting the explicitly social element in Hegel's early critique of Kant and Fichte, with special reference to the *Natur-rechtschrift* and *System der Ethik*, which she analyses in great detail and with consummate skill. It appears that Hegel derived his indictment of Kant's abstract moral imperative, as well as of Fichte's perpetually striving "ought" quite consciously from his conviction that the ultimate root of the modern malady was to be found in the "bourgeois property form" (not capitalist property, but "private" or exclusive possession, a form stemming from Roman times) with its attendant consciousness of "subjectivity" and legalism, which "sharpened" contrast to the "substantial-freedom" of ancient Greece where the distinction between public and private had been unknown. This, it was the actual experience of "finitude" in social life which produced the philosophy of finitude, of arid methodologism and impotent subjectivism, in Kant and his followers. Dr Rose adduces further support to her main argument by an adroit "sociological" reading of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics and religion as well as the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*, making *en passant* a number of interesting reinterpretive suggestions.

A great deal of what she presents in this book is ingenious and whether or not one is fully convinced by its main thesis, *Hegel Contra Sociology* deserves serious attention. It is a work of confident and accurate scholarship as well as of verve and originality; Dr Rose makes us look at Hegel's "speculative" experience with renewed interest and she de-

serves special praise for her refreshingly independent way of turning on authors whose position is surely – quite close to her own. One of its severity of style and the absence from it of any attempt to explain things communisensually. No concession whatever is made to the general reader and even among students of Hegel only those nurtured on modern Marxist texts will be able to make ready sense of the author's rather involved idiom. The book also suffers from a certain imbalance, while some aspects of Hegel are treated at great length, the critique of sociological theory and of its alleged neo-Kantian paradigm is condensed and not always as circumspect as one would wish. But the author's declared aim is to "retrieve" Hegel's speculative experience and this is of course by no means the same as offering (let alone achieving) a comprehensive interpretation of Hegel's oeuvre. Yet one suspects that if Dr Rose had been more catholic, and paid regard for instance to Hegel's expressly political texts (from the *Verfassungsschriften* to the "English Reform Bill" and the *Additions to the Philosophy of Right*), her thesis concerning the fundamentally radical and "negative" impact of the Hegelian absolute might have been more difficult to sustain.

This leads me, finally, to what may be a more pertinent line of criticism of a challenging thesis. What Dr Rose propounds is a heterogeneous and in the last resort not entirely satisfactory account of Hegel's absolute. Her presentation, hovers between two different readings of Hegelian philosophy with the result that she assigns two closely related yet significantly divergent meanings to the absolute. On the one hand, she evinces a fine and subtle understanding of the (as I would argue) authentic Hegel, the philosopher *sui generis*, the thinker whose very "essence was ambiguity" (as Toniomies once said), whose abiding paradoxicality, and underlying "despair" and "tragic" perspective on the modern epoch, are all fully acknowledged in the present book. The genuine and meaningful "absolute" pertains only to this Hegel: it is "absolute" precisely and exclusively by virtue of signifying the speculative "completion" of experience, its completion as well as reaffirmation. It is absolute in the strict sense: there can be nothing beyond it.

Yet on the other hand Dr Rose's acute interpretive sense is continually betrayed through a lingering involvement with utopian radicalism of the kind found especially in so-called "Left Hegelians" from Cieszkowski to Habermas – and this in spite of her welcome and explicit rejection of such a departure. The two absolutes, those of Hegel and the Left Hegelians, are not the same. The Hegelian absolute may indeed present us only with a maddening *cul de sac*, or alternatively it might be seen as providing an opening towards existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics or whatever – but this is Hegel, take it or leave it. The radical absolute, however, cannot be a proper abstraction, a utopian "beyond". Dr Rose, alas, frequently descends into this radical idiom when she argues, for instance, that Minerva's owl is able to "herald the return of Athens, freedom without domination" or that "absolute consciousness", the coalescence of freedom and necessity, "can only be achieved in a just society" or "freedom without domination" and "the just society" are abstractions which have no proper speculative meaning, they relate to an "absolute" which is only absolute, as it were, by courtesy.

Now the point of all this of course is to call attention, once again, to Dr Rose's main contention that the absolute lends "social import" to Hegel's philosophy. The kind of social import she seems to have in mind follows only from the stance of radicalism which is no more genuinely speculative than is conservative, neo-Kantian sociological theory. From Hegel there emanates only "restlessness" but no direction; he is not "contra" sociology.

Nightshade

Enchanter's nightshade is
Of all flowers the least;
I saw her poisoned sister
Glean from the hedge.

Wild wood-bine, cover her,
Slee, move away!
And yet it is she
Remains in memory.

C. H. Sisson

MUSIC

Settings for sacred Latin

By Robert Donington

JOSEPH KERMAN:

The Masses and Motets of William Byrd 360pp. Faber. £25. 0 571 11643 4

William Byrd has always ranked high in our English estimation, it being generally understood that he was our first equivalent to Palestrina. Byrd's pioneering performances of sacred polyphony at Westminster Cathedral early in this century cemented the comparison, presenting as they did so many then unfamiliar masterpieces in this splendid kind; and while not perhaps best put quite in that form, the valuation implied is not wrong. Indeed, Byrd's assimilation of Continental imitative polyphony was crucial too. But he remained very English in the course of it.

He is in the top league for the two reasons ordinarily required to put a composer there: first, there is about his work a certain rare but recognizable stamp of quality, over and above the ordinary levels of excellence; and second, there is also about it a breadth and universality likewise rare and important though not perhaps indispensable. For Palestrina, as the exception which proves the rule, was relatively narrow in his field, and only gained his reputation as a giant of musical history by the absolute concentration and perfection of his idiom, which he modified with time, but much less than did Byrd. By comparison, Byrd did not so much concentrate as develop, arriving at perfection only by experiment, and moving through a fair amount of trial and error along the way.

Byrd sought out his mastery not only in the great vocal arts of equal-voiced polyphony (later somewhat

more varied by grave homophony) where Palestrina polished his almost flawless achievement, but also in those expanding areas of idiomatic instrumental music in which his contribution was of high historic significance and artistic value. This applies particularly to keyboard music, with its fruitful developments in variation form, but in a notable and influential degree, too, to consort music on viols, and to solo song with consort accompaniment. In the main idioms of his time (other than Italian monody) Byrd was a splendid all-rounder. Joseph Kerman compares Byrd very well with Bach, on the grounds that both composers covered wide fields of instrumental as well as vocal music, but much more for breadth of appeal across that range, so as to get over to all sorts of people.

Byrd rates a monumental study, but (except for H. K. Andrew's very special monograph on *The Technique of Byrd's Vocal Polyphony*) he has not had one until now; and the most important point to make about Kerman's book and the two other volumes by Philip Brett and Oliver Neighbour which together will complete a massive trilogy, is that they are providing exactly that. The job will not have to be done over a second time. Fellowes, who did so much for Tudor music, had all the virtues but also some of the defects of the gloriously enthusiastic amateur. Thurston Dart, who was not an amateur, had his erratic moments. What we are getting in these Faber volumes on Byrd is professional in the most solid sense – reliable, informative and enthusiastic too. Neighbour's Volume Three on *The Consort and Keyboard Music of William Byrd*, the first to the post, has had the warm and appreciative reception it richly deserves: almost incredibly painstaking and detailed, it so glows with love and understanding that the detail becomes as fascinating as it might otherwise have been tedious. Kerman's volume, with some

very proper differences of temperament, is in the same kind, matching up well to its companion, as I have no doubt the remaining volume also will.

Kerman, whose doctoral dissertation (later published) was on *The Elizabethan Madrigal*, made his name with that heady little masterpiece, *Opera as Drama*, which still resounds down the academic and not so academic corridors. But his maturest achievement hitherto, and one of the very best books known to me of its difficult kind, was his analytical study, *The Beethoven Quartets*: analysis of that rare order which takes you further into the music and not merely into its technical apparatus. That study traced the workings of key-tonality as an absolutely vital element both of form and of meaning. Here, Kerman is dealing not with key but with mode: but it is all tonality, and Kerman knows and makes the most of this basic fact. I do not think he is able to get quite so far with mode as he did with key, but that is probably in the nature of the case. Mode is more elusive, more ambivalent, more apt to fade in theory into controversial classifications and in practice into distinctions without a difference. Still, no one doubts that mode was real and important, and one of the services which Kerman renders to Byrd's individual pieces (and with the same blend of thoroughness and excitement which Neighbour brought) is to scrutinize and illuminate their modality.

Another service has been to do the best that can be done with the considerable difficulties of order and dating. My remark above about Byrd experimenting and developing through successive stages was only made after I had read this book, which distinguishes three relevant stages in his career not previously clarified: an early apprenticeship; a middle flow of almost combatively assertive and political (Catholic) implications, brilliantly associated by

Kerman with the communal hazards of the recusants, of whom Byrd was one; and a late dedication to liturgical music which could never be legally, but was (and far more boldly) illegally performed in actual services at grave risk of fines, imprisonment or execution. For, of course, the central question which arises over all this very considerable music of Byrd's to sacred Latin words is how did it get composed, and how used, at a period in which the English language was compulsory for liturgy, and at the very least expected wherever else the use of Latin words might be regarded as rendering sacred words unintelligible to the many?

But here we already have part of the answer. Kerman cites the popularity (even if it was not quite so general as the rosy view of Elizabethan society has been in the habit of maintaining) of amateur music-making in the home. The less educated sang a great many psalms in English metrical translations, as the very numerous editions of Sternhold and Hopkins (and a few other Elizabethan psalters) show. The more educated sang chamber music, including both anthems to English words and motets to Latin words, as well as English ayres and Italian and English madrigals. Byrd's motets would seem to have found a perfectly natural reception within this chamber repertory. Why should they not?

We have not perhaps allowed enough, in connection with the use of sacred Latin words in Elizabethan music, for how living a language Latin still was (and remained until the setting of the words in Latin and after the Age of Reason). It was not unnatural for educated people to write, or to talk, or to sing, in Latin; it was happening all the time. What the 49th Injunction of Queen Elizabeth's hard-won compromise of 1559 actually required for the service was "a modest distinct song" setting the liturgy, "that the same may be as

plainly understood, as if it were read without synging", and for the anthem which was also officially permitted, "the best sort of melody and music that may be conveniently devised, having respect that the sentence of the Hymne may be understood and perceived". Too much counterpoint was disapproved of as obscuring the sacred words, Latin was forbidden as making them unintelligible to the many. But not even in public forms of worship was it forbidden to those institutions whose members could be assumed to find it intelligible.

But what about Byrd's Latin Masses, in which not merely the language but the liturgy was the impediment? Kerman deals very effectively with this much more formidable question, arguing, I should think with perfect correctness, that dangerous as it undoubtedly was, Catholic services were not uncommonly celebrated with full style and panoply in some of the great houses of the Catholic families, for whom Byrd meant and composed and (even more daringly) published (without title-pages) his wonderful music in that form. He was, of course, a favourite at court, where the Queen herself kept higher ecclesiastical state in her private chapel, and had more sympathy for the old forms than it would have been polite for her to advertise. And she should like to think, too, that the Elizabethans, except when they felt threatened, were not persecutory and did not much approve the hounding of this mainly very loyal minority by the extreme fanatics among the establishment.

At any rate, Byrd survived and prospered, acknowledged Catholic though he was; and Joseph Kerman has taught us far more than we knew before about that aspect of this very great Englishman's career. He earns our gratitude, and so do Faber's for publishing, with appropriate excellence, this major enterprise of musical scholarship.

In Harmonie fram'd

By Wilfrid Mellers

STEPHEN RATCLIFFE:

Campion: On Song 200pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £9.50. 0 7100 0803 1

It is a truism that during the Elizabethan and Jacobean age music and sweet poetry agreed with perfection that the English had never attained before and haven't since recovered; and the fact tells us something about the character and quality of life in that crucial phase of the country's history. Given the intrinsic interest of this poetry-cum-music and its wide and deep cultural significance, it is surprising that there has been little research into the creative interaction of these two disciplines. If the obvious reason is that few critics regard themselves as adequately qualified in both fields, we have to admit that our specialism disadvantages us in relation to our forebears. Nor merely scholars like Bullen, but also knowledgeably music-loving poets like Auden, have been content to discuss Elizabethan lyrics without recognizing that words-for-music are in a different genre from words for themselves. Today, we are no less obtuse about the singing poets of our second Elizabethan age, since while a few "serious" critics have written about the verse of a Bob Dylan or a Joni Mitchell, attempts to consider these words as springboards for music are minimal. The words, not merely the music, are thereby falsified.

In an attempt to redress the balance in relation to the Elizabethan who was, if not the greatest song-writer, certainly the most consistent practitioner of words-for-music, Stephen Ratcliffe has jumped heroically in at the deep end. He has

written an entire book about a single twenty-four line lyric of Thomas Campion: wherein he seeks to demonstrate that

what a listener hears when he hears *Now winter nights enlarge* is a multitude of harmonies among parts moving in and out of different systems of relationship. Every word in the patterns functions in a formal, logical, syntactic, semantic, phonetic, rhythmic and so on; at the same time, in conjunction with the note or notes to which it is set, every word also functions in patterns of musical rhythm, melody and harmony. Similarly, in conjunction with the word or syllable it sets, each sound in the music functions in a comparably multiple set of musical and verbal systems. In the mixture of the two complexly ordered systems, one hears words in terms of music and music in terms of words. The beauty of the pattern lies in the harmony of its parts.

After a preliminary chapter skimming around the nature of the problem and the shortcomings of previous critics, Ratcliffe engages head-on with the poem as a poem. The section on "Syntax and Subjunctive" is in effect an Empsonian analysis of the functioning of the verbal language; demonstrating how, by way of implicit and illicit metaphors such as the phallic candles and vaginal "hunnies", what appears to be (and is) a simple song about the delights of winter nights indoors, releases in us subconscious feelings of unexpected range and potency. Not surprisingly, the deep-mined jewels of meaning which Ratcliffe unearthes sometimes obscure rather than illuminate and enrich; but on the whole he writes lucidly, persuasively, and with a wry, slightly defensive humour appropriate to his subject. This chapter is both rewarding and enjoyable.

The next, on "phonetic Structure", rather aggressively asserts that it is not meant to be enjoyable, but pitches its claims for reward on the high side. In immense detail Ratcliffe analyses the patterns of assonance, consonance, stress and metrical regularity and irregularity which conjoin to make Campion's "Eare pleasing Rimes". If one had the patience, one could do as much for any poem: though Ratcliffe properly maintains that the arduous task is most justified in the case of a poet like Campion who, being also a composer, devised his verses with their verbal sounds as collateral to, and hardly less important than, their sense. When one has wrestled with all this, an insubstantial mouse emerges from the mountains of effort. How much does it help to know that Campion's sound-patterns, "substantively meaningless", are "linked in different but seemingly always familiar syllabic combinations with one another", and thereby "conspire to bewilder – literally amaze – the mind of any listener who hears them"? Any fool of a mind, abetted by open ears, could accept that.

Having proceeded from verbal meaning to verbal sound, Ratcliffe moves into the overtly musical dimension with closely related chapters on music and on prosody. These try to relate the semantic and verbal patterns as previously defined to the pitches and temporal durations of Campion's melody which cannot sustain the emotional and intellectual weight that Ratcliffe wants it to carry. It is a good tune, effective in context; but I am not convinced that its musical patterns work with the precision and consistency that Ratcliffe attributes to them. He admits that Campion's tune doesn't pretend to the particularity and immediacy of a representative song of Dowland or Danyel, while claiming more for its empiricism than seems to me war-

ranted. Sometimes his commentary goes against the musical sense of a phrase: as when, to take an example almost at random, he remarks that the setting of the words "Now yellow waxes lights" is marked by a progressive lengthening and intensifying of its metrically stressed syllables, yet being weaker than war because it is set to two quavers instead of one crotchet. It is true that the progression from low to war is an increase in stability since it descends through an octave from one tone G to another on the first beat of a bar. But this is far too simple an account of the total effect, since one also hears yet as a stronger, not weaker, stress than war because it is high in register and is, moreover, pressing up through the sharp leading note. What it amounts to is that one cannot, or should not, isolate metrical duration from other aural factors. Throughout this song the effect of durations, perhaps even their actual length, is modified by tonal and harmonic considerations. Whether or not it implies modulation, an F sharp in the ascent is different from an F flattened in the descent; and the difference may be rhythmic, if not metrical, as well as harmonic.

This brings us to the crux of the matter: for although Ratcliffe purports to write an in-depth account – perhaps the first – of the functioning of interrelated words and music in a single small song, he stops short at the point of confrontation. Though he discusses in some detail the metrical relationships between words and tune and has something to say about pitch, he ignores almost totally the dimensions of colour and rhythm (as distinct from metre) in the vocal line, and of tonality, harmony, texture and timbre in the lute part, all of which are inseparable correlatives of the verbal meanings dexterously unravelled. He says he makes these omissions willingly: first because to have comprehensively co-

vered the musical dimensions would have made an already exhaustive and exhausting book still more rebarbative; and secondly because, not being a musicologist, he is unequipped for the task. The first of these reasons is frivolous: readers willing to grapple with what he has already offered (the frequently tells us how tough we are) would hardly balk at further effort bringing richly proportionate rewards. The second reason is indefensible, for Ratcliffe is clearly a clever, music-loving man who could have afforded to eschew his perhaps inappropriate pretence to "scientific" rigour in order to acquire the technical know-how that would have enabled him to discuss musical and poetic elements on equal terms. For that one needs to be a musician, but not necessarily a "musicologist".

As it stands, the book laudably assays much but ends in anti-climax. Given its premises, it cannot embrace "The World in Harmonie fram'd", which means that its premises are wrong. There is need for a supplementary volume of about the same length; and there is no valid reason why Stephen Ratcliffe – whose present book remains bravely commendable – shouldn't himself write it.

Great Pianists Speak for Themselves (204pp. Robson Books £6.95, 0 86051 157 X) is a collection of interviews in which thirteen pianists (Claudio Arrau, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Alfred Brendel, John Browning, Alicia de Larrocha, Misha Dichter, Rudolf Firkušný, Glen Gould, Vladimir Horowitz, Byron Janis, Lili Kraus, Rosalyn Tureck and André Watts) discuss their careers and their work. The pianists were interviewed by Elyse Mach who contributes notes on the circumstances of each interview. The book has an introduction by Sir Georg Solti.

Purely for show

By J. S. Bratton

MICHAEL R. BOOTH:
Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910
190pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£12.50
0 7100 0739 6

A year or two ago a friend of mine, a keen but non-professional theatre-goer, visited the touring exhibition of costumes mounted by the BBC to satisfy the public interest in one of its historical extravaganzas. My friend had enjoyed the series, but was greatly disappointed by the costumes because they were all fake, not real silks and jewels at all. I was astonished by the theatrical naïveté revealed by the complaint, and also greatly edified. It suggests that the electronic audience not only refuses "authentic" spectacle but wishes it to be in some ways literally true.

Michael Booth's book on Victorian spectacular theatre provokes such reflections partly because he eschews them rigidly himself, making no link between his subject and the modern entertainment industry's massively expensive evocations of the past and the future as back-grounds for its romances. He sets his study of theatrical spectacle in what he calls "the predominant pictorial ethic" which "cut across all social classes" in the period 1850-1910, when visual stimuli dominated all aspects of art. This is seen as a response to "the new architectural environment" of the growing cities, and as part of "the developing taste for luxury, ostentation and outward show" which also expressed itself in pictures, interior decoration, and the "extra-illustration" of many things previously left plain, from periodicals to shop windows.

Many of the contemporary critics Booth quotes were dismayed by the shows of London and evinced that theatre audiences especially as passive, and lacking the imaginative response to poetry upon which earlier drama had been founded. Subsequent commentators have tended to accept this self-criticism, and despite his sympathy with the period Professor Booth also acquiesces in the impression that the taste for spectacle was an unsophisticated, unimaginative theatrical response. He explores, therefore, many aspects of the presentation of spectacle, but after his very wide-ranging opening chapter on Victorian culture leaves the role of the audience in each theatrical exchange unexplored.

This leads to an account of spectacular theatre which is fascinating and precise about its technical aspects, but which does not offer explicit critical discussion of its uses and effects. Spectacular production was no doubt very prescriptive in its shaping of the theatrical event, but it was still capable of being used variously, and either well or badly - it is, after all, a technique, and one particularly flexible in the hands of a powerful producer. It is easy to deduce from Booth's accounts of individual productions that these plays were quite distinct experiences for their audiences. It is also surely possible to discriminate between good and bad spectacular melodrama. Recent experience of the revival of Boucicault's *The Streets of London*, for example, suggests that it is a far better play than many others, and which also used climactic stage fires, but which ran for only a night or two in the 1860s. Further consideration of these plays, including critical assessment, is necessary if nineteenth-century theatre is to be finally rehabilitated.

Professor Booth's survey, by concentrating on technical advances, brings together many different kinds of spectacular drama which aimed at very different uses of visual effects. He demonstrates that the extremely realistic staging of domestic interiors became part of the presentation of plays set in modern times; the realization of pictures, and the reconstruction of historical scenes in an archaeological "authentic" way, were

a routine part of Shakespearean production; melodramas of sensational action offered "real horses, real water, and representation of earthquakes, and in pantomimes, glittering phantasies of ladies paraded and song, and batteries of faeries descended from the flies in aerial ballets. All this is spectacle; but a consideration of the part played by the audience in each case would suggest that it includes not one but many kinds of theatre. The modern domestic setting is realism as near to nature as it can be. Such staging was only spectacular because the settings chosen were opulent. Every gradation of spectacle from that point takes the stage further from reality, and towards more complex and sophisticated demands upon the imagination. The built-up, authentic historical set presents problems of perspective and scale evident in some of the photographs reproduced (but not fully discussed) here, which reveal that both the drawings of sets and the content-

of the collaboration of the audience in creating the effects aimed at in spectacular staging is most interesting in the kind of Victorian drama which deals with supernatural subjects. Booth mentions the fascination which faeries had for Victorian artists of all kinds; much stage production used spectacular illusion not to reproduce the natural world, but to create visual, quasi-tangible realms of fantasy, in every mood from the grotesque and burlesque (of which

Robin Hood is a restrained example) to that of full-blown Gothic horror. The co-existence of horror and comedy in pantime, literature, and especially stage production dealing with Fairyland, is itself indicative of the multi-dimensional response of which the Victorian audience was capable; lightning modulations between pantime and tragedy were quite acceptable.

Booth's detailed description of Irving's *Pastor*, a most effective piece of reconstructive theatre history, could be taken to illustrate this creative flexibility of response, and emphasizes Irving's hold mastery of the theatrical means of evoking it. It shows how Irving's panty control of colour in the scene was at once symbolic and practical, and worked with his skill as an actor, when he appeared and posed in Mephistopheles' red costume against a succession of eerily-coloured scenes. Grotesque effects near to pantomime, and by-play of low humour,

were repeatedly turned to produce tension. To provide a context for his own performance, Irving brought the full resources of spectacular technology into play, including carefully authenticated archaeological reconstructions of medieval Nuremberg, and at the other extreme, battery-operated sparks flashing from swords, and a cup with three different electric lights in it to illuminate his "ermine". The genius was Irving's, and the skills were his and his collaborators', from Ellen Terry to the eight-limbed men; but the suspension of disbelief was that of the Lyceum audience, prepared to be delighted when a cathedral wall painted on gauzes disappeared, and breaking into rapturous applause, at once a shivering silence, when Irving appeared in a puff of ingeniously-generated steam and spoke his lines so as to make them believe for a moment that he was the Devil. My credulous and disappointed friend could have learnt something from them.

McCosh came of strict Ayrshire farming stock. An autobiographical essay, written at the end of his life, makes him out to be a clever, pious and somewhat isolated boy who saw duty and learning as a means of distancing himself from the zealotry and vulgarity of rustic life. In retrospect, he thought that this had made him a sturdy, self-reliant boy, a true legatee of the antinomian spirit of the Scottish peasantry. He was clearly destined for the Kirk, and by 1829 he had made his way to Edinburgh University, where he promptly fell under the spell of its two most charismatic teachers. The first, Sir William Hamilton, was the last of the great Common Sense philosophers; the second, Thomas Chalmers, was the voice of a new, civilized evangelicalism that was to have a decisive influence in shaping the Scottish evangelical movement in the years before the Disruption.

From Hamilton, McCosh learned how vast erudition and great dialectical agility could be employed to demonstrate the limits of human intelligence and, more iconoclastically, the vanity of the pretensions of many modern, and particularly German, philosophers. From Chalmers, "certainly the greatest [teacher] I ever studied under", he acquired a brand of evangelicalism that stood in sharp contrast to the zealotry in which he had been raised and learnt that mental and natural science were "but compartments of one great fabric reared to the glory of heaven come down to shed peace among men".

McCosh had a marvellous career and Hoeveler has an attractive thesis to offer. He sees McCosh as the embodiment of two conflicting strands in Scottish intellectual life: the polite, moderate, common-sense discourse of Reid and Hamilton, and the enthusiastic evangelical discourse of his childhood refined by Chalmers. He argues that McCosh's intellect was shaped by the tensions between these modes of thought and brought into focus by a preoccupation with a traditional Scottish style of teaching in which moral and men-

The evangelist of Common Sense

By Nicholas Phillipson

I. DAVID HOEVELER, Jr.:
James McCosh and the Scottish Intellectual Tradition
From Glasgow to Princeton
344pp. Princeton University Press.
£15.95

James McCosh's career was made of the stuff that Victorian Scottish myths are made of and it is extraordinary that J. David Hoeveler's *James McCosh and the Scottish Intellectual Tradition* should be the first major study of it.

McCosh came of strict Ayrshire farming stock. An autobiographical essay, written at the end of his life, makes him out to be a clever, pious and somewhat isolated boy who saw duty and learning as a means of distancing himself from the zealotry and vulgarity of rustic life. In retrospect, he thought that this had made him a sturdy, self-reliant boy, a true legatee of the antinomian spirit of the Scottish peasantry. He was clearly destined for the Kirk, and by 1829 he had made his way to Edinburgh University, where he promptly fell under the spell of its two most charismatic teachers. The first, Sir William Hamilton, was the last of the great Common Sense philosophers; the second, Thomas Chalmers, was the voice of a new, civilized evangelicalism that was to have a decisive influence in shaping the Scottish evangelical movement in the years before the Disruption.

From Hamilton, McCosh learned how vast erudition and great dialectical agility could be employed to demonstrate the limits of human intelligence and, more iconoclastically, the vanity of the pretensions of many modern, and particularly German, philosophers. From Chalmers, "certainly the greatest [teacher] I ever studied under", he acquired a brand of evangelicalism that stood in sharp contrast to the zealotry in which he had been raised and learnt that mental and natural science were "but compartments of one great fabric reared to the glory of heaven come down to shed peace among men".

McCosh had a marvellous career and Hoeveler has an attractive thesis to offer. He sees McCosh as the embodiment of two conflicting strands in Scottish intellectual life: the polite, moderate, common-sense discourse of Reid and Hamilton, and the enthusiastic evangelical discourse of his childhood refined by Chalmers. He argues that McCosh's intellect was shaped by the tensions between these modes of thought and brought into focus by a preoccupation with a traditional Scottish style of teaching in which moral and men-

evangelical circles abroad. He began to travel widely on the Continent and in America, but failed, optimistically one would think, as a new Edwards or a new Butler, or, more realistically, as a new Paley. In America he was spoken of as the man "who lights out battles with Mill, Comte, Spencer and the Pantheists".

Belfast was clearly intended to be a stepping-stone to a suitable chair at Edinburgh. He applied for the Chair of Moral Philosophy there in 1852 and lost it in a famous row which McHoeveler overlooks. By now McCosh had probably lost touch with Scottish evangelical circles, though this subject is unfortunately not explored here. Perhaps he was too cerebral and cosmopolitan a figure for a Kirk that became increasingly provincial after the death of Chalmers. At all events he left Britain for good in 1858 to become President of Princeton. He was met at that formidable, pietistic college by brass bands, cheering students and a reminder from a trustee that "unsanctified learning is a curse. Nothing is more evident than that knowledge uncontrolled by religion becomes Satanic".

If Princeton had expected a conventional, orthodox intellectual, it had seriously misjudged its man. McCosh settled at "ma college" for the rest of his long life. Within twenty years he had more than doubled the size of the faculty and student population and had launched a vast building programme that was underwritten, it seems, by alumni and the Scots-Irish community. Under McCosh's presidency, Princeton acquired an enviable reputation for excellence in teaching and research in the arts and sciences. And it was all undertaken in the unquestioned belief that the interests of mental and natural philosophy were being harmonized with those of true religion. As he put it in a characteristic apologetic metaphor, whereas the arts and sciences were "citizens not of one country but of the world", religion "is a citizen of heaven come down to shed peace among men".

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It will be seen from my work, that I am attached to what has been denominated, the *common sense* principles of the Scottish School of Philosophy and that I am opposed, on the one hand, to the materialistic tendencies setting in so strongly from various quarters in Great Britain and France, and on the other hand, to the idealistic or transcendental Metaphysics which is leading so many of our most promising youths into mazes in which they are at first bewildered, and are then ready to allow themselves to be put under the guidance of an imposing Pantheism, or a pretending German Theology, which virtually sets aside the authority of Revealed Religion.

From 1835 to 1851, McCosh was a parish minister at Arbroath and Brechin. They were formative years. He left the established church at the Disruption ("the greatest event of my life") and spent the next eight years directing his formidable political skills to establishing the new Kirk in his parish, writing his first major book, *The Method of Divine Government*, *Physical and Moral*, and marrying the daughter of an evangelical grandee. McCosh must have had his eye on high office in the Free Kirk - particularly after the death of Chalmers in 1847 - and one would guess that he accepted the new Chair of Logic and Metaphysics at Queen's University, Belfast, as a step in that direction. There he proved to be a tireless teacher, an active university politician and a voluminous author, taking on idealists, materialists, geologists and completing his most substantial if now redundant work, *The Intuitions of the Mind Inductively Investigated* (1860). This sealed an already growing reputation in

philosophy was placed in a commanding position in the university curriculum and annexed to the task of teaching undergraduates the principles of virtue and natural religion. This, says Hoeveler, was the tradition McCosh brought to America, and in so doing, he created one of the principal channels of communication between the Scotland of the Enlightenment and Disruption and the academic culture of America.

It is the greatest pity that Hoeveler does not have the resources to develop this adequately. The Scottish chapters bristle with errors which indicate ignorance as well as carelessness. For example, it will not do to place Edinburgh University's new "campus", completed by "Robert Playfair", in Charlotte Square, or Thomas Chalmers's statue in "King George IV Street". It weakens one's confidence in Hoeveler's grasp of the rudiments of Scottish intellectual history to find that he has invented a new Glaswegian medical luminary

attempt to obtain a Chair of Philosophy at Edinburgh University. Only in the useful chapter on his ministry at Arbroath and Brechin is any new ground broken, but even this period invites further research.

Unfortunately, these weaknesses are not confined to the Scottish chapters. The account of his career as a teacher and academic politician at Belfast is evasive and even the account of his presidency at Princeton seems unimpressive. This is a sad disappointment as McCosh was one of those evangelicals who combined erudition and zeal with remarkable political and administrative talents and an understanding of them is essential for an understanding of the workings of his mind. He used to say of Princeton, "I built it. It's mine." But Hoeveler tells us so little about this side of his career that it is impossible to say whether this is a statement to be taken at face value or not.

Hoeveler's account of McCosh's intellectual career is rather better. The discussion of his debts to Hamilton and of his encounters with theories of evolution is careful and useful although it is extraordinary to find that his debts to Chalmers are taken as read and treated almost in passing. But even so, Hoeveler's summaries make heavy reading. The reason is that McCosh was not a particularly original philosopher and his ideas do not summarize well. What Hoeveler forgets is that his skills lay more in the field of apologetics and philosophical disputation than in systematic philosophy. His reputation stemmed from the colossal learning, dialectical virtuosity and, above all, literary flair he employed to sniff out and eradicate theological error in ancient and modern philosophy. McCosh was frequently and rightly applauded for his literary style, which was direct, iconoclastic, compulsively readable, that of a man brought up in the tough world of Edinburgh literary polemic - a "gorgeously embroidered robe of imagery and eloquence", as one reviewer put it. If the true quality of McCosh's intellect is to be savoured, his thought needs to be set in the context of contemporary evangelical disputation, and he needs to be quoted often and at length.

Perhaps the most disquieting feature of Hoeveler's analysis is his lack of insight into McCosh's view of the Scottish intellectual tradition and of his own place within it. For McCosh had the mind of the true autobiographer who thinks of his career in historical terms and is willing to bend history in order to underpin it. Nowhere is this more evident than in his remarkable and best-remembered

book, *The Scottish Philosophy*, published in America in 1875 "as the last, and to me the only remaining, means of testifying my regard for my country - loved all the more because I am now far from it, and my country's philosophy, which has been the means of stimulating thought in so many of Scotland's sons". It is a work of vast erudition, a series of notes and essays on the works of major, minor and very minor Scottish philosophers. It was designed to set the history of Scottish common-sense philosophy in the context of Scotland's changing political, economic, social and, above all, religious fortunes after the Union. It was also designed to demonstrate the emergence of a genuinely empirical study of mental science, Dugald Stewart, Victor Cousin and, in his way, T. H. Buckle had all attempted similar histories but McCosh thought that they had not been alert enough to the social implications of the gulf which had opened up between theology and philosophy. For while common-sense philosophy had catered for the needs of an urbane, polite elite, more interested in manners and the appearance of things than in the more profound problems of religious understanding, it had failed completely to satisfy the spiritual needs of ordinary people. For this both evangelical pastors and philosophers were responsible. The former had for the most part remained sunk in zealotry and ignorance and it was not until Chalmers's day that any serious steps had been taken to reconcile mental science and evangelical teaching. And among the philosophers, even Hamilton, the greatest of them, could be criticized for possessing an understanding of the mind which was too cerebral, and flawed by his ignorance of physiology and his failure to understand the true status of intuitive knowledge. As McCosh feared, a philosophy which veered towards the sort of relativism that could all too easily sink into materialism and agnosticism. In fact, the *Scottish Philosophy* was an elaborate apology for McCosh's own philosophical career. He thought he had discovered a crisis of profound importance in the fabric of Scottish theology and philosophy. And he regarded himself as uniquely qualified to solve it.

McCosh's learned and provocative history, which continues to be controversial even today, was an integral part of an antinomian view of Scottish culture which took shape in Victorian Scotland and was strongly connected with evangelicalism. It worked on the assumption that the Union, and the rapid material improvement it had brought with it, had created deep fissures in Scottish society, separating the old familiar culture of the countryside from that of the modern, commercial world. It had brought into existence a cultured, Anglicized, modern-minded elite, buttressed by a moderate clergy, a neo-classical literature and a philosophy of manners. In the process it had been alienated from the traditional values of a peasant society living off the soil, supported by an inherited vernacular culture and the severe, populist spirit of the covenants. Thus, in spiritual terms, the Union had deprived Scotland of the pastoral care of its lairds and its evangelical clergy. It had replaced the cultural and religious bonds of the old country with those of a materialistic commercial civilization.

There is no denying the charm of this view of Scottish history. Occasionally, as in the case of G. E. Davie's extraordinary and idiosyncratic *Democratic Intellect*, or David Craig's equally remarkable and idiosyncratic *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, it has produced

Stanley Cook

Laughable contradictions

By John Kerrigan

DAVID FARLEY-HILLS:
The Comic in Renaissance Comedy
189pp. Macmillan. £15.
0 333 27514 4

David Farley-Hills argues that comedy rests on contradiction, juxtaposition and detachment. It creates incompatibility, and what Bergson calls "anesthesia of the heart". While tragically contemplates the consequences of conflict, comedy seeks in aggressive dialectic. It inclines towards variety, gravitating through reserve into dilemma. Put an ass between equal piles of hay and it will starve to death; put Dr Farley-Hills there and he will laugh.

The idea is valuable, if antique; but it proves resistant to generalization. Marlowe, Kyd and Groucho Marx are all misread as Farley-Hills forces comic contradiction into a Poetics. Moreover, when the deed is done, when bleak, cheerful and unresolved contradiction are extrapolated into "the satiric, the celebratory and the neutral" modes of comedy, the result is a Procrustean bed of criticism: only capable of accommodating complex plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Jovial Crew* by doing them violence.

Misrepresentation begins with Jonson and Middleton, interpreted as a pair of satirists obsessed by the contradictions implicit in the Christian view of man. Jonson is said to give emphasis to the benefit of the doubt, emphasizing its basic goodness and teachability, while Middleton sees it through the spectacles of Calvin, depraved, despicable and usually damned. It's a dubious polarity, and Farley-Hills chooses odd texts to support it. In late plays like *The Magnetic Lady* and *The New Inn*, Jonson does present generosity generously, and he creates a few characters capable of change; but Farley-Hills refers to nothing in the canon after *Bartholomew Fair*, and he concentrates on *The Alchemist*, a play notably lacking in "teachable" characters, a play which rewards pragmatism and wit, not niceness. Farley-Hills falls back on a theory of instruction through a "hierarchy of standards"; but the idea that Lovewit represents "Christian man" is almost as absurd as the notion that the "Cicero of *Catalina*" (sic), who rules Rome through lies, bribes, informers and prostitution, "symbolises the divine Truth".

As for Middleton: spiritual despair might be found in *The Revenger's Tragedy* or (at a pinch) *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*; but what dominates the early comedies discussed in this book is the dramatist's delight in human ingenuity and his extraordinary sympathy for the weak and exploited. Farley-Hills fastens on the Courtesan as a central Middletonian figure, "the epitome of human cor-

ruption... that combination of lust, greed and vanity which aggregates all the sins of the world"; but this description, which would be unjust if applied to Beatrice-Joanna, is hopelessly irrelevant to the engaging Frank Gullman and the various Courtesans of *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, the two women who thread Farley-Hills's chapter together.

If Middleton's comedy is darkened beyond recognition, Dekker's is whitewashed. Thus, *The Shoemakers' Holiday* is presented as a "celebratory" play of "unloyed jollification", an interpretation which can only be maintained with the help of censorship. Eyre's shady business practice is ignored; and his snobbish, vain and tight-fisted wife is complimented for the solicitude which she shows Ralph when he returns "safe" (i.e. badly maimed) from the war only to find his wife missing, even though Dekker makes it clear that Jane has been forced out of the shoemakers' household by Margery herself. The distasteful sweetening of Dekker proceeds relentlessly. Not

even *The Honest Whore* and *The Roaring Girl* can check it: for, citing D. J. Lake's careful attributions only to ignore them, Farley-Hills carves up the comedies as he pleases, giving the glum bits to Middleton and anything happy to his collaborator.

The Taming of the Shrew is offered as an example of "neutral" comedy. For Farley-Hills, it's a text informed by unresolvable conflicts - male versus female, festive versus cynical - finally brought to equilibrium. Although the chapter on Shakespeare has some awkward moments ("the serenity of *The Tempest*"), the ultimate reconciliation of contradiction in divine benevolence that is asserted in... *The Two Gentlemen*"), it is nevertheless the best in the book. Its superiority seems to stem from the freedom allowed by the play itself. *The Shrew* is left to speak for itself; its complexity is not sacrificed to a "satiric" or "celebratory" paradigm.

The Comic in Renaissance Comedy is riddled with errors and inconsistencies. "Horatio's love for Bel-Imperia" does not develop "from their mutual aim of revenge" (page 29); and Surly can hardly come to Lovewit's house as a Spaniard "to woo Dame Pliant, though principally to warn her of the real intentions of Face and Subtle" (page 74) since he only learns of her cost-union on arrival. It is unreasonable to complain about "the over-luxury punctuation" of *The Alchemist* on the basis of a mispunctuated quotation (pages 56-7), and some kind of record to make two substantive and seven accidental errors in a single citation of fourteen lines (page 70). *Semiotique* picked out with inverted commas in early play-texts are not necessarily endorsed by the author (page 82). If Christian values can be taken as a "convention" (page 17), why must audiences "believe in them" (page 92)? If authorial intentions are not to be postulated (forbidding why should they be "presumed" (p. 9)? Dr Farley-Hills has evidently been impressed by the contradictory vigour of Renaissance Comedy.

Competitive codings

By Peter Holland

KEIR ELAM:
The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama
248pp. Methuen. £7.50. (paperback, £3.95).
0 416 72050 1

The theatre tempts anyone interested in the study of signs to take a closer look. Even before we get past the foyer, long before the performance starts, we are overwhelmed by the sheer number and variety of the language systems that compete for our attention. The Prague School theorists of the 1930s announced that "all that is on the stage is a sign" but today's semioticians know better. The arrangement of the seating, the means by which you buy your ticket, even the original decision to go to a play at all are subject to endlessly encoded practices which cry out for the cryptographic skills of the advanced semiotician.

Of course, it is too easy to mock. Semiotics is a discipline that finds it extraordinarily difficult to achieve a balance between trite generalizations and pointless excesses of microscopic dissection. Too often we are irritated by being told the obvious, or by long-winded presentation of minute and useless detail. Yet in the movement from the large-scale to the particular, in the examination of extremes and exceptions, the semiotics of theatre can make the theatre-goer aware, in a peculiarly satisfying way,

of the implications and meaning of many things he takes for granted.

Keir Elam's book is the first substantial attempt in English to chart the full range of problems that the semiotics of theatre and drama aim to cover. Given the attention devoted to cinema semiotics in England, it might be thought that the theatre has been unfairly neglected, but Elam shows how far work in France and, particularly, Italy has already gone. Lucid and informative, it is an excellent guide, leading the reader in careful steps into borrowings from contiguous disciplines. When he wishes to discuss the meaning of gesture in the theatre, for instance, he makes use of Ray Bird-whistell's work on kinesics, the study of "body-motion communication".

The book is divided between the study of actual performance (the semiotics of theatre) and the study of "that mode of fiction designed for stage representation" (the semiotics of drama). Rightly, Elam worries about the interrelation of the two areas without in the end offering a convincing solution. He is at his best in dealing with theatre semiotics. The major problem for performance analysis is of course the evanescence of the performance itself. Each individual performance constitutes a different text and, unlike film, the show cannot be stopped and restarted at the analyst's will. Filming the theatre performance only transfers the theatre into another medium, subject to its own very different systems of meaning. Elam concentrates on exploring the density

of theatrical communication, the multiplicity of subcodes it contains. At times his work is too rigidly schematized, isolating each separate subtextual exaggeratedly from its surroundings. Each code has extensive and complex overlaps, turning voice, body, light, set, theatre architecture and all the other factors into an inter-related whole.

Elam's analysis of drama semiotics, of the written text, is less rewarding. His approach to dramatic language suffers from a too rigorous exclusion of the non-verbal factors influencing the meaning of the dialogue, and the result is oddly bookish for someone who had already demonstrated such sensitivity to the workings of the play in the theatre. His final experiment of "a dramatological analysis" of "the first eighty lines of *Hamlet*" uses eighteen columns to systematize the commentary line by line. Any analysis that has space to tell me that the first line ("Who's there?") has a "boulomae modality" containing "epistemic tentativity" but cannot include the fact that Francisco and Bernardo are nervous and apprehensive is fundamentally misconceived.

In spite of such shortcomings, Elam's study is provocative and encouraging. It is also extremely useful in providing a long annotated bibliography, though it is surprising that he does not mention *Surplus de la Voie de la création théâtrale*; these essays edited by Denis Babel as *Les Voies de la création théâtrale* are collections, eight volumes so far, which provide by far the best analyses of theatre performances so far produced.

Picture of a Cornfield

I stop, whatever exhibition is on,
Before this part of the permanent collection,
Wind it a little and shake it like a watch
Beyond repair that for a moment goes again.
This is the path the farmer ploughed up
When he sowed the corn, making a fool
Of the signpost showing a right of way.
Short-cut to the station people have trodden back.
Now at a distance their heads bob about
Among the ripened, rustling, foaming ears;
The miracle they made themselves stop them drowning.
The sky is blue and the trees are fully dressed
In dusty dark green leaves; wild pansies
Show their faces between the stalks of corn
And a rabbit panics out of the hedge.
People I know approach along the path
And almost reach the point where its beaten soil,
Like a trick explained, emerges from the field.
Before they speak, the walls of the gallery
Fade in again, as either the pull of the city
Asserts itself or I draw back in self-defence,
Finding as usual nothing to fit the question
How came I and the painter, whose dates are all
I know of him, in the same field in a different field
At the same time at a different time,
Feeling the same? Was everyone once there?

Stanley Cook

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